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edited by Jars Balan

Identifications: Ethnicity And The Writer in Canada

**IDENTIFICATIONS:
ETHNICITY AND THE WRITER IN
CANADA**

Edited by

Jars Balan

**The Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies
The University of Alberta
Edmonton 1982**

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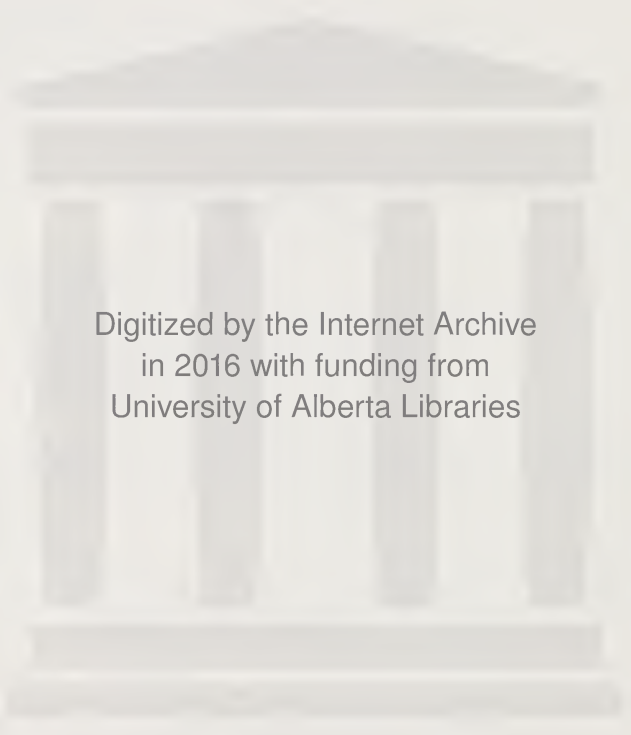
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Introduction

It is obvious that Canadian literature, whatever its inherent merits, is an indispensable aid to the knowledge of Canada. It records what the Canadian imagination has reacted to and tells us things about this environment that nothing else will tell us.*

These observations by Northrop Frye sum up the importance of the literature of this country. But what in 1965 was so “obvious” to Frye was not so apparent to many of his colleagues, who determinedly resisted the introduction of Canadian literature courses at the University of Toronto. Fortunately, that battle was won, and “Canlit” is now studied at most post-secondary institutions in Canada. Moreover, the quantity of books written on Canadian literature since 1965 indicates the progress Canadians have made in the literary medium.

Much work remains to be done, however. Undoubtedly the most significant gap in our knowledge is Canadian literature in languages other than English or French, which has been excluded from most discussions and assessments of Canadian letters. To examine this area, the Canadian

*Northrop Frye, “Conclusion,” in *The History of Canadian Literature: The Literature of English Canada*, ed. G. Klinek et al. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1970), 822.

Institute of Ukrainian Studies and the Department of English and Comparative Literature at the University of Alberta decided to hold a conference in the fall of 1979. Our aim was to make a modest contribution toward broadening Canadian literature beyond the usual bilingual perimeters.

Minority-language literature expresses only part of the ethnic experience in Canada. As the conference was a pioneering venture, the organizers wanted to include as many aspects as possible. We also wanted to stress that ethnicity has historically been and continues to be an important and dynamic element in the evolution of Canadian culture. But we were restricted by a lack of qualified speakers: many ethnic writers are known only within their particular ethnic communities and then only to those small circles with literary interests.

We called this larger concern "the ethnic dimension in Canadian literature." Three main areas of interest were identified. First, Canadian literature in languages other than English and French. Here, we made a distinction between "émigré" and "landed immigrant" writing. The former consists of the work of writers exiled in Canada, who have no interest in becoming integrated into the Canadian literary community. The latter encompasses writers who live in Canada (are possibly even born here) and aspire to reach a Canadian audience even though they write in a minority language.

The second area was mainstream Canadian prose and poetry; writing within majority-language Canadian literature that draws extensively on the ethnic experience. Jewish Canadian writers have provided the best-known examples of this particular genre, but numerous writers from other ethnic backgrounds have also contributed significantly. To be included in this category, a work must have some ethnic content and be produced by a writer from within an ethnic culture and community. Thus, not every Canadian writer with an ethnic background merits discussion in the *Identifications* theme. Nonetheless, the area should provide material for consideration and comparative analysis.

Finally, studies of ethnic minorities also seemed to fall within the boundaries of the ethnic dimension in Canadian literature. We wondered how ethnic minorities are perceived by such different writers as Ralph Connor, Margaret Laurence and Marie Clair Blais, to name but three authors who have created ethnic characters in their fiction. We felt that such an examination would complement the discussion of how ethnic writers perceive English and French Canadian society, in addition to illuminating the outlooks of many well-known Canadian authors. Although this is a sensitive topic, we were confident that the research would prove to be valuable, particularly in assessing whether the writers have created

believable ethnic characters.

We also debated the inclusion of native Canadian literature under the ethnic designation and concluded that although native people were not really "ethnics" in political terms (because of their unique aboriginal status), culturally they shared much with ethnic minorities. We therefore asked the Indian and Metis communities to participate. We also thought it consistent with the conference theme to accept papers on Scottish and Irish elements in English Canadian literature, since both groups have made quite distinct contributions toward the literature of "English" Canada. We wanted to challenge the perception of anglophone Canada (especially by members of ethnic minorities) as a cultural monolith.

Having determined the framework for the discussions, we had to deal with the practical considerations. As the undertaking was organized by the Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies in commemoration of the seventy-fifth anniversary of Ukrainian publishing in Canada, we focused somewhat on Ukrainian Canadian literature. Although this limited the time we could devote to other literatures, it did provide us with an important secondary focus for the conference. Moreover, this area has been the subject of extensive research.

We also tried to reach beyond the narrow academic arena to involve students and members of the general public. A lunch-hour film series and a book display were well received and a series of readings (two on campus and one in Vegreville, Alberta) and panel discussions involving writers from across Canada drew enthusiastic responses.

The organizers wanted to deal with the question of ethnicity in some of its contemporary aspects. All too often discussions of ethnic identities look to the past, afraid of confronting the issue squarely in its present form. Our guest authors and poets did not disappoint us. Among those who participated in the weekend's activities were Maria Campbell, Pier Giorgio di Cicco, Maara Haas, Joy Kogawa (for part of the conference), Myrna Kostash, George Ryga, Andrew Suknaski, Yar Slavutych and Rudy Wiebe. Other writers in attendance included Douglas Barbour, Stephen Scobie and Tom Wayman, who chaired various sessions.

Most of the proceedings took place in September 1979 at the University of Alberta campus in Edmonton. The conference was opened by Dr. Henry Kreisel, professor of comparative literature at the University of Alberta, and was closed by the director of the Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies, Dr. Manoly Lupul. Although it is impossible to convey the entire conference, the papers and the discussion reproduced here tell part of the story. This is appropriate. The endeavour marked only the beginning of a long process of academic enquiry and self-discovery and this collection is necessarily tentative and incomplete.

There remain some regrets: in particular, the failure of the conference to involve more participants of non-European origin. Perhaps future gatherings will correct this imbalance. I hope that others will take up and improve on the work of the *Identifications* conference. There is much to be gained from the further study of the ethnic dimension in Canadian literature, but one reward is more tantalizing than the rest: what we learn may not only change our understanding of Canadian literature, but may also change fundamentally how we see ourselves.

Jars Balan
Edmonton
October 1981

Henry Kreisel

The “Ethnic” Writer in Canada

It was in a large, overcrowded army barracks in the little town of Pontefract, in Yorkshire, that I made the deliberate decision to abandon German and embrace English as the language in which, as a writer, I wanted to express myself. The barracks, part of an army camp, had been hastily converted into an internment camp for German and Austrian nationals who had been rounded up in the large northern English cities, chiefly Leeds and Sheffield. It was in the middle of May 1940. The British government, at least partly in response to the fateful events that were then unfolding in France, had decided to intern all so-called “enemy aliens,” though most of the internees were in fact refugees who had left Germany in the years since Hitler came to power in 1933, and Austria after the *Anschluss* of 1938. Most of the internees, myself among them, were Jewish, but there was also a significant number of political refugees among us, socialists and communists, and some devout Christians, both Catholics and Protestants, who had fled from Germany and Austria for reasons of conscience.

This was the first stage in a journey that was to take many of us to Canada, where we spent nearly two years in internment camps, mostly in Quebec and New Brunswick.

Strange though it might seem, the internment experience as I see it in retrospect, and as to some extent I apprehended it also at the time, had important liberating effects. First of all, it freed me from a dreary and soul-destroying factory job and gave me some time and an opportunity to set into motion a deeply felt ambition to try my hand at writing fiction. In the attempt to try my wings I had to make a decision that was, for me at least, momentous. I had to commit myself to a language that was not my

own, that I had spoken for barely two years, and in which I had done hardly any writing at all. But I knew that I would never return to Austria to live, that henceforth my life would be lived in English-speaking countries, and that I wanted therefore to embrace, totally, the language, and with it the attitudes, the cast of mind, the way of thinking and feeling, of English civilization. I was only dimly aware that this would mean, on a very deep level, an entirely different approach to feeling, and therefore an alteration of basic parts of one's identity, but it would not be until very much later that the full dimensions of that decision were to manifest themselves and to produce a crisis that caused me much anguish and that was, in one form or another, to persist for some years, and that would reoccur from time to time throughout the whole of my adult life. Basically, it concerned the nature of the material of my writing, both creative and critical, the approach to that material, and the linguistic means of expressing that material. With hindsight, and the experience of nearly forty years, I have come to the conclusion that I have never fully resolved all the difficulties inherent in a situation that arose when I tried to render European experience in an adopted language. And it was to take many years before I dared to tackle essentially Canadian material. I can say now also that without the help, the presence in my imagination, of Joseph Conrad, the Pole, and A. M. Klein, the Canadian Jewish poet, I could not have resolved the crisis at all, and the adventure I so boldly undertook in that overcrowded army barracks in Pontefract would have inevitably ended in total failure.

But at seventeen I was very romantic. Endless possibilities opened out before me, even in an internment camp, even in dark days, even in moments of depression. Perhaps especially in moments of depression, when some vision, however distant, seems to shed a kind of radiance, a glow, that illuminates the darkness and helps to mark, dimly perhaps, with the light constantly overwhelmed by shadows, the outlines of some path that would lead me out of the darkness and into the light.

And really, it is a good thing that young people can dream of boundless possibilities, that they are quite unaware, or only very dimly aware, that in the waters in which they propose to swim there are submerged rocks. Ignorance really can be bliss, because, blissfully ignorant of danger, they do not suffer from fright. The daring young man on the flying trapeze really can accomplish things that an older, wiser man would not even dream of attempting.

So, seventeen years old, sitting on a straw mattress (the only space readily available in that crowded barracks hall in Pontefract), I boldly projected, not a simple short story, but a novel. That novel was to deal with the attempt of a young man, an orphan (I even invented his name,

suitably international and romantic: Miguel Amore) to discover his moral identity in an immoral universe, symbolized by a Kafkaesque city, unnamed and menacing. The novel was to be called *Miguel Amore*, but I also thought of calling it *The Torch of Hate*. During the next year and a half, it was in fact written—285 pages in four large notebooks. I thought that these had long since been lost until, to my surprise, they turned up in an old suitcase that I had faithfully dragged along with me without ever really looking to see what it contained. (I found there also a diary I kept during the period of my internment, and that I allowed to be published in the journal *White Pelican* in 1974.)

So I set out to become an English-language writer. (Canada was, of course, not in my consciousness at all. I barely knew that the country existed.)

Some doubts about the whole enterprise nevertheless soon crept in. Because as soon as the dreams had to be turned into reality, some real linguistic mountains had to be climbed. And I became aware that I did not have much equipment for the climb. I did not even have an English dictionary.

Suddenly I found myself asking some fundamental questions. Could one really change one's language as if it were a shirt? And could one simply throw the discarded shirt away? I came to know people who had been emotionally and psychically so bruised by the Hitler experience that they wanted to shed the language he had spoken and, they felt, had corrupted. Halting and awkward though their English was, and though they could speak the language only with a thick and heavy accent, they nevertheless refused to speak German and insisted on speaking English. They would thus forcibly suppress part of their innermost selves, and cast it off with the language of their mothers, the language of their childhood memories. It was the expression of a rage so furious, of a despair so profound that they were willing to tear out the very roots of their psychic being, to obliterate the very core of consciousness, of which language is the prime instrument. As if one could create a new identity for oneself by denying and destroying the old. Here I learned at once, and in a very practical way, how closely linked identity is to language, how intertwined are the emotional and psychological centres of the personality with the language in which that personality expresses itself.

The road of forcible suppression of my native language I did not want to take. Such violence I did not want to do to myself. Though my country had been taken from me, the language of Grillparzer, of Goethe, and above all of Schiller (the poet I most admired) could not be taken from me. It belonged to me by right, and I exercised that right in the long and passionately written letters I sent regularly to my mother. (Some of these

have survived, and so I do not have to rely on the memory alone when I recall them.) Yet I *did* want to change languages; I knew that, and knew also, intuitively, that this would mean, if not a total change, then at least a major modification of identity and everything connected with it, even though I was not yet sure, and would only learn slowly and painfully, what that commitment meant. At the time I only felt it as a necessity, as one way, not of obliterating, but of reducing my psychological dependence on my native language.

There was among the internees at Pontefract a small, owl-like-looking man of about thirty-five, though he seemed older. He had only a few wisps of hair, his shoulders were stooped, he walked with a curious slouch. Most of the time he sat on his straw mattress, deeply immersed in books he had brought with him. They were, as I found out, Latin texts. For he was, someone told me, a distinguished classicist. He had been a Docent, and had published. His whole manner did not, however, invite one to approach him. Nevertheless, I did. I told him what I had determined to do. I wanted to write in English. Did he think it could be done?

He peered at me over the rims of his glasses, looking like a curious bird whose feathers I had ruffled, whose peace I had disturbed. He sat on his straw mattress, with his legs tucked under him in the lotus position.

Then suddenly, in a high-pitched voice, he screeched, "Haben Sie Latein studiert?"

A strange question. I did not know what relevance it had. Yes, I said, I had studied Latin. For six years in the *Gymnasium*.

"Das ist nicht genug," he said. "Nur weiter. Nur weiter. Weiter Latein studieren. Dann können Sie's machen."

Like an oracle having delivered its cryptic message, he indicated by his manner that he had said all that was necessary. He returned his attention to his book. Identity for him was clearly tied up with the ancient and once international language. I was puzzled, but have since often pondered if perhaps he meant to tell me something about discipline, about the necessity of immersing oneself with single-minded devotion in the study of language as language. I remained standing, waiting to see if the oracle would perhaps deign to say something more comforting. Sensing that I was still standing there, he raised his eyes and peered up at me again. "Chamisso hat's gemacht," he said. "Der war Franzose und ist dann ein deutscher Dichter geworden. Josef Conrad war ein Pole und ist ein englischer Schriftsteller geworden."

That was more comforting than his bleak instruction to study Latin. It gave me hope and I plunged at once into deep water, only to find that I was drowning. A diary entry of 30 May 1940 records that two chapters of *Miguel Amore* had been written, but that I was dissatisfied and angry, and

decided not to write any more.

A few months later, in an internment camp in New Brunswick, I had the great fortune to meet Carl Weiselberger. He was much older than I, but we became friends. He had been a distinguished journalist in Vienna, and was subsequently to have a distinguished career with the *Ottawa Journal*. Weiselberger, a warm and gentle man, was wonderfully understanding. I showed him some of the things I had written and opened myself up to him, expressing both my ambitions and my fears. He understood the problems. He was critical, but never destructive. He constantly encouraged me to do more. And he also told me about Joseph Conrad. For a long time Conrad remained an image, and an important psychological presence. But I could not read him because I could not get any of his books. Not until many years later did I occupy myself intensively with Conrad, both with the man and with the writer. I then found out that the circumstances that had compelled him to leave his country and adopt another civilization and another language were very different from the circumstances I faced. But this merely demonstrates the extremely complex psychological forces that are at work when a writer sets out to appropriate a language that is not originally his own, and attempts to use it as an instrument of creation.

The matter becomes even more complicated (if I may be allowed to digress for a moment) when a writer feels that his native language is, in some profound way, not his own. There is some evidence, for instance, that James Joyce, one of the great magicians of language, felt that way about English. In a significant passage in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, Stephen Dedalus, speaking to the dean of his college, who is an Englishman, thinks:

The language in which we are speaking is his before it is mine. How different are the words *home, Christ, ale, master*, on his lips and on mine! I cannot speak or write these words without unrest of spirit. His language, so familiar and so foreign, will always be for me an acquired speech. I have not made or accepted its words. My voice holds them at bay. My soul frets in the shadow of his language.¹

It would take a separate paper to explore Joyce's bewildering relationship with language, but I have long believed that he saw himself as the conqueror of a language that had in the first instance been imposed upon a conquered people. And by the use of an alien instrument whose absolute master he had become, he would create not only his own identity, but that of his people, and he would forge, as Stephen Dedalus puts it, "in the smithy of [his] soul the uncreated conscience of [his] race."²

II

In Conrad's case there were extraordinarily intuitive processes at work, though their causes can be fairly reliably reconstructed. They have their roots in the completely unsuccessful Polish uprising against Russian domination in 1863, in which his father, Apollo Korzeniowski, played a leading role. The collapse of the uprising was followed by the forced exile of the father, which Conrad shared together with his mother; by the mother's death at the age of thirty-four in 1865; and then by the death of the father four years later, after he had been allowed to return to Cracow, a sick and broken man no longer considered dangerous by the tsarist authorities. All this, as Conrad later noted, under "the oppressive shadow of the great Russian Empire—the shadow lowering with the darkness of a new-born national hatred fostered by the Moscow school of journalists against the Poles after the ill-omened rising in 1863."³

Conrad's past included not only the exile of the father, in which the son was of course involved without conscious choice, but also, an altogether more momentous matter, the self-chosen exile of the son. When Conrad left Poland, he was in a sense exchanging one kind of exile for another. For to be a Pole and not to be allowed, at least officially, to use one's own language, to see national customs and institutions defiled and outlawed, the country itself arbitrarily divided between three great imperialist powers and Poles excluded from its governing, was to be exiled in one's own country. But this at any rate was a condition which millions shared and fought against. By choosing to uproot himself and go to sea, he was escaping from the stifling atmosphere of an oppressed country, but he was at the same time also removing himself from the patriotic struggle in which his whole family had been deeply involved, and for which his father had sacrificed his life.

Since Conrad first made his choice (if one can even use the word "choice" here) when he was a boy in his early teens, he could not have been consciously aware of all the issues, but the tremendous opposition which his mere intention aroused, and the extraordinary steps taken by his guardian to try and dissuade him from actually carrying it out, must have made the seriousness of his planned step quite clear to him. That he persisted and finally broke from the land of his origin "under a storm of blame from every quarter which had the merest shadow of a right to voice an opinion,"⁴ shows not mere stubbornness, but a deep emotional need, a need so strong that it enabled him to defy the "astonished indignations, the mockeries and the reproaches of a sort hard to bear for a boy of fifteen."⁵ Years afterward he still feels the need to justify his action, for the echoes

of the reproaches linger on, the commotion aroused in the society in which he moved still agitates him, and the voices of the past still demand to be answered:

I catch myself in hours of solitude and retrospect meeting arguments and charges made thirty-five years ago; . . . finding things to say that an assailed boy could not have found, simply because of the mysteriousness of his impulses to himself. I understood no more than the people who called upon me to explain myself. There was no precedent. I verily believe mine was the only case of a boy of my nationality and antecedents taking a, so to speak, standing jump out of my racial surroundings and associations.⁶

If Conrad's need to leave Poland was intuitive, his first transformation—from a Polish youth to a British seaman—was calculated. "I had thought to myself that if I was to be a seaman then I would be a British seaman and no other. It was a matter of deliberate choice."⁷ The second transformation—from a British seaman to an English writer—was not, at least according to his own testimony. In his "Author's Note" to *A Personal Record*, he admits that the fact of his not writing in his native language had been much commented on, but goes on to disclaim any deliberate choice in the matter:

The truth of the matter is that my faculty to write in English is as natural as any other aptitude with which I might have been born. I have a strange and overpowering feeling that it *had* always been an inherent part of myself. English was for me neither a matter of choice nor adoption. The merest idea of choice had never entered my head. And as to adoption—well, yes, there was adoption; but it was I who was adopted by the genius of the language, which directly I came out of the stammering stage made me its own so completely that its very idioms I truly believe had a direct action on my temperament and fashioned my still plastic character.

It was a very intimate action and for that very reason it is too mysterious to explain.⁸

The beginning of his writing life, he says later in *A Personal Record*, was not determined by "the famous need of self-expression which artists find in their search for motives. The necessity which impelled me was a hidden, obscure necessity, a completely masked and unaccountable phenomenon."⁹ One might have thought that the early, searing experiences of Jozef Teodor Konrad Korzeniowski had something to do with that masked and unaccountable phenomenon.

The English writer Conrad, however, had some difficulties in dealing with the Polish experiences of Korzeniowski. He could not openly grapple with the ghost of the past in his fiction. Overwhelming as the experience of his childhood and early youth was, it does not enter his imaginative work directly. With the exception of one or two rather insignificant tales, Poland does not appear in his fiction. The Polish experience had to be transmuted by the alchemy of the creative imagination, and appeared in his fiction with its identity transformed. One can see, in *Nostromo*, for example, behind the South American sombreros, the faces of men whose ancestors were feudal landowners or silent, sad-eyed peasants in a less tropical land; one hears that experience echoed in the memories of oppressed people and their aspirations for liberty; one finds that experience in the many tales of political outrages and massacres that can be found in Conrad's fiction from the very beginning to the very end. In his letters, in interviews, in autobiographical writings, he freely acknowledges his Polish identity, but in his fiction he must deal with it obliquely. There the consciously fashioned identity of the British seaman (who can often be seen in the *persona* of Captain Marlow) and the English writer takes precedence.

Conrad gave me courage, but also caused me despair. He taught me to have respect for my adopted language, especially because it was an acquired instrument, and one had to earn the right to use it. He caused me despair because he made me realize that I was not a magician of language, and that my gifts were extremely modest when compared to his. But to know one's limitations is never a bad thing.

Conrad's solution of how to deal with the raw materials of his experience could not be mine. It was A. M. Klein who showed me how one could use, without self-consciousness, the material that came from a specifically European and Jewish experience. I began to understand that identity was not something forever fixed and static. It was rather like a tree. New branches, new leaves could grow. New roots could be put down, too, but the original roots need not be discarded. In the end, I thought that I could perhaps use a double perspective that allowed me to see European experience through Canadian eyes, and Canadian experience through European eyes, and so to say something that, however modest, might have some value. Thus language and identity could be brought into focus, each modifying the other, but without the one destroying the other. And the new language could be made to express the old as well as the new. It was a constant struggle that one had to accept. There were many aborted efforts, many failures, a few modest successes. One was grateful when something succeeded, and learned to accept failure. What mattered ultimately was the attempt, now and again, to break the silence.

For a writer, of course, the question of language is crucial, and the "ethnic" writer, particularly of the first generation, must come to terms with the question of what language he will use. That, as I suggested, is a very complex decision, and I am inclined to believe that it is fundamentally a decision taken on the deepest subconscious or even unconscious level, almost compulsively, a response to a deeply felt need, though neat rational explanations may later be furnished, either by the writer himself or by others.

For some writers of the first generation a change of language is not possible, usually because they are too old when they immigrate and their linguistic pattern is too solidly ingrained for them ever to feel truly able to play the instrument of another language. I am thinking of poets like Walter Bauer, or George Faludy, or Waclaw Iwaniuk, and of novelists like Josef Skvorecky. Their works in the original language must therefore remain inaccessible to a larger audience, and the circumstances in our country being what they are, the audience that is able to read works in, say, Czech or Hungarian, or even in Ukrainian or German, is likely to be a diminishing one.

We must therefore at least have recourse to translations. That is not a perfect solution, but it does at least make some of the works of significant writers available to us. This process was accelerated when the secretary of state, through the multicultural programme, began to make grants for translations available to publishers. But even before these grants became available there had been what is certainly for this country a rather remarkable development of the publication of "ethnic" literature in translation. Thus Mosaic Press brought out *Modern Romanian Poetry* and the *Anthology of Ukrainian Lyric Poetry*, as well as a trilingual edition of the work of the Chilean-born surrealist poet Ludwig Zeller. And John Robert Colombo, in a successful anthology called *Poets of Canada* (published by Hurtig), has included translations of more than twenty Canadian poets writing in languages other than English or French. A translation of Skvorecky's *The Bass Saxophone* appeared in 1977 and a translation of his new novel, *The Engineer of the Human Soul*, will appear this fall.

There is no doubt that whatever mixture of motives led the former¹⁰ Liberal government to announce the policy of multiculturalism in the House of Commons in 1971, the effect has been to open some doors that were hitherto closed and thus to broaden our perception of the feelings and sensibilities of the many people who form the fabric of this country.

At this time, the economics of publishing being what they are, it is not likely that more than a handful of writers will have some of their works translated. Thus a writer living in Canada, but using neither English nor

French, is faced with the dilemma of how to communicate with an audience outside the narrow circle of those who can read him or her in the original. An even greater problem that writers of the first generation face is how to maintain the vitality of the language they use. They no longer hear their language spoken in the ordinary course of daily life—in the streets, in the shops, in their places of work, in the theatres, at sports events, on the radio and on television, in the bars and beer parlours. When they speak their language, it is usually at home, with their wives, perhaps with their children, and in small, intimate groups with friends. But the great and powerful stream that carries their language flows elsewhere.

For the writers of the second generation, or for those writers of the first generation who are able to adopt the language of the country in which they now live, the central problem has to do with the raw material of their art. For they must first of all muster the courage to confront that material honestly. There are ever-present doubts whether the material will interest the majority of the people living in the country, whether indeed the material is inherently valuable. I certainly confronted such doubts when I first set out on my way nearly forty years ago. One must climb curious psychological mountains. But linguistic mountains also.

How, if you are going to write in English about people who do not in fact speak that language, do you render their speech? Do you make them speak a kind of broken, pidgin English, so that what emerges is the worst kind of stereotype? When you do that, you at once rob your people of their dignity, make them into caricatures, less than human. How, if you are a second-generation "ethnic" writer who is dealing with people of the first generation, do you render their lives, their struggles in a strange, cold land, their sense of alienation and their slow setting down of new roots in often stony soil?

One of the central patterns in the writings of the second generation, and one of the most painful to confront, has to do with the cultural pressures that operate in an immigrant society and that become particularly acute for young children as they grow up and are torn by conflicting loyalties and ambiguous emotions about their own identity. That theme is at the core of such novels as Adele Wiseman's *The Sacrifice*, of Mordecai Richler's *Son of a Smaller Hero* and *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz*, and of John Marlyn's *Under the Ribs of Death*.

It is the writers of the third generation, Myrna Kostash in *All of Baba's Children*, say, or Monty Reid in a just-published book of poems called *Karst Means Stone*, who can now look back at the past in order to reinterpret it and re-evaluate it from a new and more secure emotional base. They operate, it seems to me, in a new and improved climate of perception, a climate at least in part created by the policy of

multiculturalism. For this policy at its best asserts the value of the contributions of many different people to the culture of this country. And one of the central functions of the writer in a society is to help raise the consciousness and thus the understanding of his or her readers.

All writers face the dangers of falsifying experience. But the "ethnic" writer is perhaps particularly prone to pander to the perceived appetites of the audience, and to play up the exotic and picturesque aspects of his material and thus to diminish and ultimately to corrupt its value.

This was a temptation whose power I have often felt and it took all the discipline I could muster to resist it. A. M. Klein taught me to seek in the memory the strength and vividness of my deepest roots. He taught me that without the sustenance that flows from these roots no creative activity of any significance is possible.

But he taught me something equally important and, ultimately, perhaps of greater significance. For without abandoning the roots of his consciousness, which were ultimately grounded in Old Testament and rabbinical literature, he added legal lore (for he was a lawyer) and the whole range of English literature from Chaucer through Shakespeare to T. S. Eliot, as well as the influences of French and French Canadian civilization. Out of these influences he created his own linguistic and emotional instruments with which to render his earliest and strongest memories of the slums of Montreal, "the ghetto streets where a Jewboy/Dreamed pavement into pleasant bible-land."¹¹ Out of the memories of his childhood and youth Klein recreates the world of the immigrant Jews, a world now largely vanished. These men and women he recalls with a certain amount of nostalgia, even with sentimentality, but also with a good deal of satirical wit. The same warm humanity is there when Klein moves out of the narrow and special environment he knew as a child to observe and comment on the life of French Canada.

Just as he amalgamated Hebrew and legal lore, and Shakespeare and T. S. Eliot, so also he intermingled Jewish, English and French culture and experience. Not to create an undifferentiated stew, but to give each element its proper and unique weight, to observe and render people other than his own with sensitivity and seriousness.

I took heart from studying him. He emboldened me to move out of my own original cultural group without ever abandoning it, to embrace the wider Canadian reality; to dare, for example, in such a story as "The Broken Globe," to render the experience of an old Ukrainian farmer of the first generation and his conflict with his son.

Long before the term gained cultural and political currency A. M. Klein demonstrated in his work the creative uses of multiculturalism, and showed how the heirs of one cultural tradition could transmit the values of that

tradition and at the same time bring a uniquely valuable perspective to the exploration of other themes and other realities of the Canadian experience so that a new level of understanding could be reached.

That is a dimension of multiculturalism that has not yet been explored and that needs to be explored. It is my impression that a good deal of thinking in the field still remains ethnocentric, and while this is understandable, indeed almost inevitable, we ought to be thinking of the next phase of development of the Canadian experience that has been shaped by many diverse peoples. And that phase, I believe, should lead us to explore the inter-relationships between the groups that form the Canadian mosaic.

In this process our writers have a vital role to play. They must fulfil the ancient function of an ancient art—to make us more conscious of ourselves and of our world. This, too, A. M. Klein knew. He accepted the fact that in our society the artist does not count for much, that he lives among neighbours who, “though they will allow/him a passable fellow, think him eccentric, not solid,/a type that one can forgive, and for that matter, forgo.”¹²

In spite of this, even because of this, Klein asserts that the artist is vital to a civilization because he gives it shape, defines its consciousness, says the word “that will become sixth sense,” tries to bring “new forms to life.” These, says Klein, “are not mean ambitions. It is already something/merely to entertain them.” In the process of struggling to express the life of his people and of his society, the artist “makes of his status as zero a rich garland,/a halo of his anonymity,/ and lives alone, and in secret shines/ like phosphorus.”¹³

Notes

1. James Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (New York: Random House, Modern Library Edition, n.d.), 221.
2. *Ibid.*, 299.
3. Joseph Conrad, *A Personal Record* (London: J. M. Dent & Sons, 1946), 24.
4. *Ibid.*, xiv.
5. *Ibid.*, 110.
6. *Ibid.*, 121.
7. *Ibid.*, 119.
8. *Ibid.*, v–vi.
9. *Ibid.*, 68.
10. At the time of writing, the Liberals had been defeated and the Progressive

Conservatives were in power.

11. A. M. Klein, *The Collected Poems of A. M. Klein*, compiled by M. Waddington (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1974), 271.
12. *Ibid.*, 331.
13. *Ibid.*, 335.

Yar Slavutych

Expectations and Reality in Early Ukrainian Literature in Canada (1897-1905)

Ukrainian writing in Canada dates from 1897, some six years after the first Ukrainian immigrants arrived in the Canadian West. The Reverend Nestor Dmytriw (1863–1925), editor of the Pennsylvania-based newspaper *Svoboda* (Liberty), then the only Ukrainian newspaper in North America, visited several pioneer settlements on the prairies and while in Calgary and Winnipeg wrote a number of sketches about the life of local settlers. His slightly fictionalized accounts were published in *Svoboda* in 1897, also appearing in the same year in a book entitled *Kanadiiska Rus'* (Canadian Ruthenia). Although Dmytriw's literary talent was limited, his sketches provide valuable insights into the life of the first settlers.¹

The first published Ukrainian poem written in Canada was "Kanadiiski emigranty" (Canadian Immigrants) by Ivan Zbura (1860–1940), a farmer from Beaver Creek, Alberta,² in the Ukrainian bloc settlement northeast of Edmonton. Zbura's lyrical piece (dated 30 December 1898) celebrating his good fortune to be in Canada was published in *Svoboda* on 2 February 1899, making it the first versified work by a Ukrainian Canadian to appear in print. Since then, some fifty-five Ukrainian poets³ and at least forty prose writers have had their books published in Canada. Moreover, a lively and varied amateur theatre also produced several generations of playwrights whose work was both published and performed (mostly one-act plays) in Ukrainian communities across the country.⁴

This diverse body of Ukrainian literature in Canada is characterized by a harsh vision of reality. Not surprisingly, the hardships of pioneering are a major concern of most of the early writings. Zbura, for example, in his folk poem "Kanadiiski emigranty," first describes the poverty of Western

Ukraine and the illiterate Galician peasants' dreams of owning their own land—dreams that were often thwarted by Polish landlords anxious about the exodus of their cheap labour to the new world. Then, with biting irony, Zbura places himself in the position of the oppressors he is leaving behind in the old country:

*Who will chop trees and bring in wood for us?
Who will harvest our fields?
Who will bow down low to us?
What kind of devil is driving you there?*

The poem continues with an invocation to the Virgin Mary:

*O blessed Virgin Mother,
Do not permit us poor Ruthenians
To perish!
To sail across the ocean
And to settle here in Canada—
Assist us!*

The poet's prayer is obviously answered, for the immigrants successfully complete their journey and settle in Alberta. Reflecting on the experience, Zbura concludes his commemorative piece with the following observation:

*There [in Ukraine] man is unhappy,
His life is as bitter as horse-radish,
But for us it is pleasant,
Here in Beaver Creek.*

But not everyone met with such a happy fate. Sava Chernetsky (1873–1934), the first Ukrainian prose writer in Canada, wrote a short story, “Z hlybyny propasty,” (From the Depths of the Abyss)—published in *Svoboda* in 1900—in which the main character, a settler named Vasyl Lasiuk, ends up freezing to death on a remote farm located “300 miles from the city and 50 miles from the next railroad station.” Lasiuk's cruel

fate is made even more bitter by the fact that his wife is in hospital at the time of the tragedy, their daughter having died from the cold two weeks earlier. Chernetsky concludes his pathetic tale with a quote from David's 129th psalm: "From the depth of the abyss I call on you, God, with all the strength of my soul, come and listen to my voice!" This outpouring of religious sentiment typified the nature of the first Ukrainian peasant-pioneers, most of whom were sincere believers who lived by the proverbial notion that "All is in God's hands." Although essentially a storyteller in the folk tradition, Chernetsky shows some literary sophistication in his use of the landscape to convey mood in describing the death of his main character.

A somewhat different approach was taken by Myroslaw Stechishin (1883–1947) in his short story "Pilot Butte," published in the small almanac *Zhuravli* (Cranes), based in Scranton, Pennsylvania (dated 1903 on the title page and 1904 on the cover). The story unfolds the tragedy of a young and patriotic Ukrainian student named Pavlo, who we learn was expelled from school in Western Ukraine for allegedly being an atheist. Seeing no future for himself in the old country, Pavlo emigrates to Canada and finds work as a labourer at the Pilot Butte CPR station in Saskatchewan. The job proves to be a gruelling test of brute strength and endurance:

The unskilled labourers threw themselves into their work, one after the other The Boss was constantly "goddamning" and throwing his hat around, biting his hands out of anger and jumping about like a man possessed.(p. 22)

Using details that evoke images of the inferno, Stechishin describes the work of laying track as a hellish task that changes a man into a senseless machine. Pavlo's daily ordeal is depicted in the following account:

Like an automaton he filled his shovel with sand and emptied it blindly into the railroad car. He was not conscious of the prairie sun scorching him like a fire. Sweat poured from his brow, not in streams but in rivers, spilling into his eyes. His vision grew dim. He neither saw nor heard anyone. Only when a water-boy approached and in a squealing voice shouted "water!" did he raise his head and swiftly wipe his face with a sleeve, quickly drinking three cups before once again taking up his mechanical labour. At work, his long day passed like a lifetime.(p. 23)

This vivid description of railroad work reveals Stechishin's talent for creating a memorable picture with carefully chosen words. Before becoming the editor of *Ukrainskyi holos* (Ukrainian Voice), he had

worked on numerous occasions as a labourer and knew well the numbing hardships that such work entailed. The boss in the story, predictably an Englishman, is characterized as a ruthless exploiter without human feelings. Coolly demanding, he clearly enjoys his power and is successful in transforming the labourers into obedient robots. Fearful of losing their jobs, the workers stifle their anger and spend all their pent-up energies on the daily struggle for survival. Almost everyone of these "goddamned" Galicians has ceased to be human, submitting instead to the law of the jungle. One of them, Kuba, who is physically the strongest, spits at everybody and actually enjoys fighting for supremacy. It is obvious that he obtains some sort of satisfaction from knowing that whereas the others are subdued by the exhausting toil, he can still rebel in the face of adversity.

But not all the workers are turned into heartless beasts of burden by the back-breaking physical labour. The author provides one interesting atypical example of a Ukrainian Baptist who sympathizes with the weak and the downtrodden. He helps the ailing Pavlo, who is completely unfit for manual labour, by bringing the youth food and water. There are others who also show signs of a more humane nature, the implication being that the illiterate Galicians had been stripped of their humanity only after coming to Canada. As the Baptist samaritan bitterly laments:

O Galicians, Galicians! You are worse than wild animals . . . (p. 32)

Stechishin describes his debased countrymen as having the peculiar habit of praying to God each morning before breakfast and every evening before bedding down in the railroad cars. But as soon as their prayers are over they forget about God and His Ten Commandments and revert to their brutish behaviour. Thus, it is decidedly ironic when Pavlo's fellow-workers denounce him for not praying with them. "He is an animal!" they exclaim. "He eats without a prayer. We cannot live with him in the same place."

Obviously, the ignorant and intolerant workers do not understand their fellow Galician, who not only lacks their physical strength and stamina, but is also alienated from them by his education and his supposed atheism. Despairing over his plight, Pavlo wearily notes that he has "seventy-five calluses on the right hand and seventy-two on the left" (p. 24). Gradually drained and debilitated by the exhausting work and by the unrelenting taunts of his fellow workers, he is eventually overcome by illness. Reflecting on the causes of his suffering, he observes that "heavy work itself kills a man, but these people are eating me alive" (p. 31). He is especially hurt that it is his own people, and not "foreigners," who are

responsible for so much of his misery. Disillusioned and desperate, he leaves the railroad bunk-car in a trance-like state one dreary night and walks barefoot into the darkness. The next day his body is found on the track, cut to pieces by a passing locomotive.

"Pilot Butte" raises many questions that deserve to be discussed in greater depth. For instance, at the time that it was written Stechishin had strong socialist sympathies and was condemning capitalism for its inhuman exploitation of workers. Indeed, the story ultimately implies that it is the system that must be held responsible for both the animal-like mentality of the railway workers and for Pavlo's suicide. At the same time the author, who had a Catholic upbringing, was also criticizing the hypocrisy of those simple-minded Christians who prayed for personal salvation yet felt nothing but contempt for those who were physically weaker than themselves. But Stechishin's depiction of the immigrant reality in Canada reduces many of the issues to a simple case of black and white where the Ukrainians are portrayed as the exploited and the English as the exploiters. He evidently saw the division of labour in Canada as being essentially racist. In short, his story was a grim warning to immigrants that despair and disillusionment would quickly evaporate whatever dreams they might have of a better life in the new world.

"Pilot Butte" is a powerful story rendered with a degree of technical sophistication that bespeaks its author's considerable literary talent. Thus, he merits recognition as one of the first writers to contribute a work of lasting value and interest to Ukrainian literature in Canada. "Pilot Butte" both enriched Ukrainian prose fiction with an important theme and provided readers with a convincing psychological portrayal of its immigrant characters. It is a worthy and, one might add, still controversial effort that deserves our consideration.

However, Stechishin was not the only pioneer writer to take a critical stand toward the immigrant experience in Canada. Symon Palamariuk, in his "Pisn pro Kanadu" (Song about Canada, 1903) published in *Zhuravli*, virtually wept in despair over the harshness of life on the Canadian prairies; he even went so far as to advise an old friend in Ukraine not to emigrate! This lengthy excerpt from his song requires little elaboration:

*Oh Canada, dear Canada,
And you, Manitoba,
There reside in you Ruthenian people
Like so much livestock.*

You, Vasyl Palahniuk,

*My dear friend,
Do not come, do not come to Canada
Because you will be disillusioned.*

*You have fields, you have children,
You have a beautiful house,
Let the Lord God help you
To be a fine husbandman.*

*Oh, I to you, dear brothers,
Through this letter do proclaim:
Surely our old country
Is like God's paradise.*

*In our country in the orchards
Birds sing everywhere,
But in Canada there are only mosquitoes,
Biting like snakes.*

*Here, our people thought,
That they would be lords,
But here they all go to work
Carrying bags.*

*Oh, here our Ruthenian people
Do not make use of the farms,
But only roam around Canada,
Looking for work.*

*Oh my merciful God,
Dear Mother of Christ,
The mosquitoes have stung my neck,
So that it's like a red beet.*

*Oh Canada, dear Canada,
How unpleasant you are,
One can only hope, dear Canada,
That no one will dream of you.⁵*

The nostalgic depiction of Ukraine as a paradise in comparison to the harsh Canadian wilderness leaves the reader with no doubt about the poet's feelings about life in the Promised Land. The mosquitoes, the hostile climate and agricultural underdevelopment are all cited in this bitter lament about life in Manitoba. It was hardly an invitation to prospective settlers.

But the attitude of pioneer Ukrainian authors toward Canada depended largely on individual circumstances and fates. There were some success stories among the tales of woe, like that of Michael Gowda (1874–1953), an ambitious immigrant who settled in the Canadian North-West in 1898. An educated man, who had been a teacher in Ukraine, Gowda soon found work as an interpreter for a farm implement company in Edmonton, Alberta. There, he wrote a patriotic poem entitled “To Canada,” which Edward William Thompson translated and published in *The Boston Evening Transcript* in 1905. Unfortunately, the Ukrainian original seems to have been lost. The following passage from Thompson’s translation, however, reveals the growing allegiance that Gowda felt toward his adopted land:

*We were not reared within thy broad domains,
Our fathers' graves and corpses lie afar,
They did not fall for freedom on thy plains,
Nor we pour our blood beneath thy star ...
But, Canada, in Liberty we work till death,
Our children shall be free to call thee theirs,
Their own dear land ...*⁶

Thus, in contrast to Palamariuk, Gowda quickly felt himself at home in the new world, which he could even address in sentimental terms within a few years of his arrival.

From such modest beginnings, Ukrainian literature in Canada has steadily grown with each succeeding wave of immigration. Moreover, as the educational level of Ukrainians has risen and their contributions to Canadian society (especially in the realm of agriculture) have been recognized, the discrimination experienced by the original pioneers has subsided considerably. The adoption of multicultural policies and the fact that government agencies now even provide modest support for literatures in minority languages perhaps best reveal the contemporary situation of Ukrainian literature in Canada. This state of affairs contrasts with the situation in Ukraine itself, where Russification and the official oppression of Ukrainian culture continue unabated. Indeed, it is ironic that in many ways it is in Canada that Ukrainian literature has the best opportunities for developing without restraint. Ukrainian Canadians have come a long way since the “Pilot Butte” days and the prospects for the future appear most encouraging; certainly, the growing interest Canadians are expressing

in the literature of their ethnic groups can only be cause for optimism.

Notes

1. *Kanadiiska Rus': Podorozhni spomyny* was reprinted, with an introduction by M. H. Marunchak and a photograph of Dmytriw, in 1972 by the Ukrainian Free Academy of Sciences in Winnipeg, Manitoba.
2. Y. Slavutych, "Ivan Zbura—pershyi ukrainskyi poet u Kanadi," *Zakhidnokanadskyi zbirnyk* (Edmonton: Shevchenko Scientific Society, 1975), 2: 28–36. Includes Zbura's photograph (36).
3. For a comprehensive bibliography of poetry, see Y. Slavutych, *Ukrainska poeziia v Kanadi* (Edmonton: Slavuta, 1976), 91–100.
4. A. Balan, "Ukrainian Amateur Theatre in Toronto," *New Perspectives*, 18 August 1979; I. Wynnickyj "Ukrainian Canadian Drama from the Beginnings of Immigration to 1942" (unpublished M. A. thesis, University of Waterloo.)
5. Reprinted in *Antolohiia ukrainskoi poezii v Kanadi, 1898–1973*, compiled and edited by Y. Slavutych (Edmonton: Slovo, 1975), 11.
6. Quoted in M. I. Mandryka, *History of Ukrainian Literature in Canada* (Winnipeg: Ukrainian Free Academy of Sciences, 1968), 42.

George Bisztray

Canadian Hungarian Literature: Values Lost and Found

Whenever I read one of those occasional essays on ethnic Canadian literature, I get the annoying, though perhaps utterly unjustified, feeling that the main themes of this literature (often inexplicably identified as "the immigrant experience") are supposed to consist of descriptions of "local colour"—natural, cultural or psychological. The vast prairies, memories of ethnic neighbourhoods a few generations ago, pride and admiration of pioneer ancestries, loneliness and alienation—these are some of the major themes. It seems as if there are only two ways open to an ethnic: acceptance or rejection. "Everything considered, life in Canada is great," declare the advocates of acceptance. "A world without values, never the same as our lost paradise was!" protest their antithetical counterparts. A realistic balance seems impossible to attain. There is a striking inability to give equal weight to idealism and disillusionment, and to overcome, either individually or as a group, the dichotomy of keeping an ethnic culture alive while also adopting the standards of a heterogeneous society and thereby becoming integrated into it.

Canadian Hungarian literature is a case in point. A first-generation phenomenon, its history dates back only to 1956. The refugee writers who emigrated in that year, and whose work now represents a qualitatively significant segment of the literature written in Hungarian around the world, still have their roots overseas. This paper will attempt to reach beyond the familiar themes of alienation and cultural conflict and identify the specifically Hungarian element in Canadian Hungarian literature. It will also try to avoid esoteric historical and cultural details in order to retain the interest of the general reader.

First, one must say something about the minority status of Hungarians in Canada. Quite simply, it is a familiar position, as for over a thousand years Hungarians have been by far the largest linguistic "minority" in Europe. Related to Finnish, Estonian, Lappish and some little-known languages in Russia, Hungarian has long been a lonely island in a vast sea of Indo-European speakers. This linguistic uniqueness has been instrumental in concealing the culture and mind of the Hungarian people from the world. Moreover, at least since the great nationalist language revival of more than one and a half centuries ago, we find the assumption in Hungarian consciousness that national identity and language are one and the same. The popularity of such proverbs as "A nation lives in its language" and "Our language is our mighty fort" indicates how widespread this assumption is within the Canadian Hungarian community. In a similar vein, Canadian Hungarian prose writers often bemoan the withering of the pure Hungarian tongue in the second generation. In fact, in the eyes of many Canadian Hungarian writers there is no such thing as Canadian Hungarian literature. To them, whoever writes in Hungarian is a Hungarian author living abroad, and whoever writes in English (I am aware of only one eccentric poet who occasionally writes in French) is an English Canadian author. Thus, using the language means taking a stand. Contrary to this common assumption, however, I intend to define Canadian Hungarian literature as an ethnic offshoot of either language, although my discussion will primarily deal with authors writing in Hungarian, since their achievements are less familiar to scholars and students of Canadian literature.

Second, Canadian Hungarian literature is not only a first-generation affair, it is also an expressly political phenomenon. To my knowledge, with the single exception of George Payerle, no Canadian writer of second- or third-generation ethnic Hungarian background has produced any significant literature in this country. As already noted, Canadian Hungarian literature is barely a quarter century old, though I would also argue that it had more than a fifty-year prehistory.¹ Contemporary Canadian Hungarian writers have come to this country (and, I might add, continue to do so) because they found their existence or goals of existence incompatible with Hungary's socio-political system. Like many first-wave Hungarian emigrants around the turn of the century, many refugees of 1956 came with the intention of eventually returning to the old country; unlike their pioneer predecessors, however, it was not anticipated material success in the new country but political change in Hungary that would bring them back. As Ödön Kiss (1921-72) revealed in his code of behaviour for the new immigrants:

*Don't say a word,
And do not nod,
Silently listen to the noise outside,
The racket and the chatting in strange tongues,
But be prepared and vigilant inside.*²

In terms of Canadian culture, this advice amounts to a call for complete inertia. Interestingly, however, the same sentiment is also expressed by one of the five most outstanding Canadian Hungarian poets, Ferenc Fáy (1921–81). Immediately after the collapse of the 1956 uprising, he wrote that emigrant writers will eventually find their voice and join the larger community, not of their fellow Canadians but of their liberated compatriots “back home.”³

This brings me to my third observation, namely, that no such turn of events has taken place. In fact, it is significant that Fáy, in his last volume, calls himself and his generation “fossils”—a most appropriate comment if one accepts (as many have) his original axiom. For even though Hungary has remained a socialist state within the Soviet sphere of influence, it is also clearly an independent political entity, unlike such nations as Ukraine and the Baltic states, which have been completely incorporated into the Soviet Union. The once common and still asserted notion that *real* (i.e., traditional) Hungarian culture exists and survives only in the emigration is simply no longer valid. But, tragically, Hungary has written off her writers in the emigration. With the exception of some token and symbolic gestures, the works of émigré Hungarian writers are not published in the old country.⁴ Only major research libraries have any copies of emigrant Hungarian authors at all, and they are usually not available to the public. Indeed, it could be said that Hungarians are even lonelier than other ethnic groups in the emigration, for on the one hand their belief in a special political and cultural mission has been eroded over time, and on the other they cannot publish in the motherland or maintain organic links with their ancestral culture. Emigrant western European writers (and I believe also certain Polish authors) at least have the latter options available to them.

One consequence of this was that Canadian Hungarian literature existed in a vacuum. In the present decade, however, it has begun revising its values with respect to both the language question and cultural experience. It is this period of transition that I would like now to examine closely.

It is appropriate to begin by asking whether a given language as a whole represents a system of values, or if only its parts do? It should be noted, however, that in the eyes of many Hungarian immigrants this question does not take such a sophisticated form; to them, the use of the language itself has value. It was therefore timely when a few years ago John Miska (1932–) (a scholar, writer and critic) called the attention of his fellow-immigrants to the fact that Canadian Hungarian literature has two dimensions: one Hungarian, the other, English.⁵ Within the latter one could already include classics (such as Marlyn's *Under the Ribs of Death*), success novels (Vizinczey's *In Praise of Older Women*) and a respectable body of poetry (by George Jonas and Robert Zend). It is difficult to say how many Hungarians are even aware of this dimension of Canadian Hungarian literature, for it is only in recent years that some Canadian Hungarian authors have begun to communicate in English. Before that, Tamás Tuz (1916–) and Ivan Halasz de Beky (1919–), among the more important poets, and John Miska and Éva Sárvári (1931–), among the more successful prose writers, experimented partly with self-translation and partly with original writing in English.

But this shift in the use of language raises the question of whether continuing to use Hungarian, or switching to English, is a sign of "alienation"—a term which obviously requires clarification. It could be argued that alienation is simply a matter of perspective. For if turning to the English language may be seen as alienation from one's ethnic heritage—from the point of view of someone within a particular group—then absolute insistence on language maintenance can be interpreted as alienation from what is perceived as mainstream society. Should we not therefore recognize that in these cases we witness clashes between complex value systems that may or may not result in alienation, depending on individual cases and specific perspectives? What are definitely not reducible to the individual level, however, are the social values of the disseminating society on the one hand or of the host society on the other.

That language maintenance has been of extreme importance to the Hungarian emigration is perhaps most evident in the fact that the concern has even surfaced in some poetry. Typical is a poem by a young poet (an engineer by profession), who immigrated in 1974 and writes under the pen-name Benedek Bebek (1948–). The poem, "News," translated here in its entirety, touches on the language issue in a very revealing way:

Steve Kovács
Hungarian gardener
felt the cold hand

*of a heart attack
and met his death
among his fruit-saplings
one early April day
in Canada.
He was 72.
Cried in Hungarian: "I'm dying!"
(he spent forty years in North
America, and yet he couldn't
speak fluent English; but his young trees
understood him because
he always talked to them
in Hungarian.)
His falling body—although
it was thin as a reed—
broke the trunk of a young
tree, and also
a new offshoot
on another,
but could not find a foothold
anymore.
Life left him forever
and disappeared among
the hazy clouds.⁶*

What makes the poem particularly interesting, of course, is that the old gardener is not a new immigrant still attached to his language, but a long-time resident of Canada.

This recurring question of language is but one indication that Canadian Hungarians—and I suspect this is true of many other first-generation immigrants—are inclined to conservatism. Confronted with the new values of the adopting society, immigrants as individuals and as groups spontaneously try to preserve their former identities. In extreme cases, the sometimes frantic attempts at preservation appear to older immigrants and to members of the host society as cultural arrogance. Although this phenomenon may well be common to all ethnic minorities, it seems that some groups more readily accept at least the most obvious values and attitudes of the host society. For instance, my own observations in this regard, based on my admittedly limited experience, lead me to believe that Northern European (such as Scandinavian and Dutch) immigrants integrate more smoothly into North American society than do newcomers

from eastern Europe (and Hungary). I find it interesting that the host societies can also be considered conservative in that they, too, have values to preserve. From *their* point of view, people who merge easily are regarded as "good" immigrants, whereas ethnic groups with more resistance to cultural integration are thought of as "bad" or at least "problematic."

Language, however, is only one of the areas where values conflict, though in the case of Hungarians the linguistic terrain assumes much greater importance because of the specific situation of the Hungarian language. But Canadian Hungarian literature also reflects many other experiences of value confrontations that might be considered part of "the immigrant experience." Moreover, in literature, conflicts of values appear in individualized, concrete forms. The shapes that even the most basic confrontations may take are theoretically infinite.

Some are conflicts between culture and civilization, where the former is understood as being a combination of a high degree of literary, artistic and spiritual values, and the sophistication of human interaction, and the latter is seen as being synonymous with economic and technical progress, material abundance and a highly developed social infrastructure. With this in mind, it is important to recognize that there have been two distinct waves of Hungarian immigration to Canada. Canadian Hungarians today come from a different social background and live in a different reality from that of Steve Kovács, the gardener, an interwar immigrant originally driven to the new world by poverty. Virtually all contemporary Canadian Hungarian writers are refugees of the 1956 uprising: they came from a country badly affected by the Second World War, postwar poverty and Stalinist terror. Moreover, they were the *products* as well as the victims of the socialist society they fled. Although there were among them people of rural origin, they were not the old, materialistic peasant-type immigrants but the beneficiaries of increased social mobility and advanced education. Eager as they were to enjoy the political freedom and the well-known technological resources of the West, they could not forget amenities such as the inexpensive yet first-rate opera and theatre performances they had access to in Budapest, or the large body of state-subsidized (i.e., easily available) Hungarian literature, which also included high quality translations from world literature. Upon arrival in Canada, the post-1956 immigrants were, to say the least, disappointed by the meagre cultural offerings of Canadian society, the language barrier notwithstanding.

Concrete expressions of the conflict between culture and civilization are to be found in the imagery that contrasts European values with those of Canadian society. It must be remembered that in the pre-jet age year of 1957, emigrants were even more aware of the huge gap between the old

and new worlds. And although the refugees knew that bread and freedom awaited them in the new land, they also clearly felt, as some of their poems reveal, that they were going into exile of a sort. Erno Németh (1903–), a traditional, conservative poet with a fine sense of form, describes his departure from Le Havre, France, in a poem that concludes with a very common sentiment:

*Down below the machines were roaring,
the minutes passed, and there came the hour
which brutally tore me out of your womb,
and banished from you, Europe.*⁷

In a similar vein Ödön Kiss, a promising poet who died at a relatively young age, described in a poem how he wept for “Mother Europe” until he could not cry any more as his boat sailed along the coast of Newfoundland.⁸ Similar experiences are also described in the works of other Canadian Hungarian writers. A poem that is of particular interest to both the literary scholar and the serious reader—because of its unique handling of the same theme—is György Vitéz’s (1933–) “Farewell to Europe.” In contrast to the explicit, rhetorical and almost classic homesickness of Németh and Kiss, we find this complex, ironic treatment of the same feelings by one of the leading poets (in real life Vitéz is a clinical psychologist in Montreal) in Canadian Hungarian literature:

*now do you see you are a vagabond
before you are of age?
you climb into this shiny-bellied plane
and leave behind this squeezed-out lemon, Europe
only its seed
you swallowed in your last grim cup of tea
somewhere between Vienna and the West . . .*

So begins “Farewell to Europe” as translated by Watson Kirkconnell. But after thus setting out from his birthplace and leaving behind names like Mozart and Brueghel, and all that they symbolize, two of the greatest poets ever produced by Hungary—Ady and Berzsenyi—come to the emigrant’s mind. By the time he reaches the final stanza, Vitéz has dealt

with the thoughts and feelings explored by Németh and Kiss in a completely different way:

*Alas, you can't spit out the lemon seed
nor will its substance melt away within you.
It stays, a beetle's wing in amber caught,
a hair-fine fracture in a crystal vase,
a music-sign of pause to end the staff.
Succor your stepson, frightened Continent!⁹*

Vitéz's entire poem is based on the dialectical tension between seemingly contradictory feelings. As a literary critic, I find that the individualized shape of its poetic expression and form takes precedence over the experiential details that are of greater interest to sociologists. And I would suggest that perhaps it is precisely this question of *how* an experience is expressed that should be the real concern of literary criticism dealing with ethnic writing. It is, at the same time, significant that both Kiss and Németh as well as Vitéz are homesick for Europe: the continent stands for the home country as well. We also find a tendency to generalize the North American experience.

It is useful to compare how Hungarians perceive Canada and the United States, and how their attitudes are reflected in the different poetic images they draw of the two countries. Essentially, one finds three positions on the subject: identification, analogy and contrast.

By identification, I mean the relating of experiences which can be considered to be as American as they are Canadian. A poem by Kiss about an abandoned country church in Canada with boarded-up windows¹⁰; Fáy's thoughts about a baby disfigured by rats in a slum in Toronto¹¹; or the frustrating boredom of highway travel that Vitéz conveys in his description of a Boston-Montreal bus trip¹²—all suggest that Canada is merely a branch plant of mechanistic North American civilization with its degraded values. Likewise, the similar attitudes the poets show in their depiction of continental holidays such as Halloween and Christmas, or even such solemn occasions as commemorations of death—events profaned in the new world by its commercialism—suggest that Canada is seen to be an integral part of America's technological society.

By analogy, I mean a description from American reality generalized in a way that also makes it recognizably Canadian. One outstanding poet whose work provides an illustration of this approach is Tamás Tuz, who

has lived mostly in Canada since 1956 but has also spent several years in California. Interestingly, most of his ironic poems describing the absurdities of civilization date from the period of his stay south of the border. Thus he must have found the evils of civilization more typical and fascinating in the United States than in Canada.

Finally, by contrast, I mean the spelling out of significant value differences between the two neighbours. George Faludy (1910–), another major Hungarian poet writing in Canada, wrote a revealing poetic letter to the mayor of Philadelphia that merits consideration. In this letter, written in the third person, he first explains how some teenage criminals had tried to “mug” him in broad daylight on a downtown street, and then states his intention to

*... pack his belongings
and return to Canada, where he does not yet
have to be confined to his quarters, to Canada
which has still not been so completely ruined
by the hailstones of prosperity and progress.*

(Translated by George Jonas)¹³

Although the world is depicted as “going down the drain,” Faludy obviously thinks that Canada will avoid this fate longer than most other countries. This typically Canadian assumption is also found in one of the short stories by John Miska. Appropriately set in Ottawa, it deals with a peddler selling his junk as genuine antiques. In the end, the unscrupulous hustler turns out to be a New Yorker who specializes in duping honest, naive Canadians.¹⁴

The clash between civilization and culture is usually expressed in terms of straightforward conflict between old and new values, but the struggle for the preservation of culture sometimes takes the shape of what may be described as defensive self-assertion. Exemplifying this approach is Gabriel Szohner's *The Immigrant* (1977), in which a Hungarian living in Toronto tells the hero of the story:

The Hungarians, sir, are above everyone, and always have been, mind you. Wherever you go in this world, wherever you find gallantry, intelligence, success, credit it to a Hungarian. (p. 116)

Of course, Szohner's presentation of this common immigrant complex is decidedly ironic. In low-brow, populist Canadian Hungarian prose, however, we find that the same self-glorifying attitude is approved by the naive writer. One short story—by a writer who has since moved to the United

States—depicts a Hungarian couple from Toronto visiting Acapulco, Mexico, with their marriageable daughter. At midnight in a bar, the girl meets her knight in shining armour, who is rich, good-looking and naturally of Hungarian descent. In an unwittingly symbolic scene, the girl's father, in order to celebrate the happy occasion, attempts to teach the *mariachi* band how to play and dance the *csárdás*—the latent fantasy of Hungarian cultural colonialism being acted out in a bar in Acapulco!

Absurd dream that this may be, the story does touch on a problem that is of concern to most immigrant groups, namely, how to deal with the preservation of familial bloodlines, and more specifically, the question of marriage. Here, the conflict is between cultural and universal priorities. A hedonist like Vizinczey insists that a woman with particular qualities is always desirable no matter what language she speaks (and, one might add, no matter what age she is). But this cosmopolitan attitude is not to be found among other Canadian Hungarian prose writers. For instance, in Èva Sárvári's novel *The Light Went On*¹⁵, we encounter a situation where the unity of a Hungarian family is threatened by a WASP secretary. And in a series of moralizing short stories by a certain prose writer, young Hungarian males are given the following paternal advice: marry a Canadian Hungarian girl, or perhaps a Hungarian girl from overseas. Should you wed outside the group, make sure your bride is French Canadian, and you might just be able to avoid calamity. But if you marry an English Canadian girl, the relationship is sure to be a disaster! All these foolish stereotypes, of course, only produce poor literature, yet they reveal much about how immigrants often perceive themselves and others.

The choice of a marriage partner is just one aspect of the larger question of new world freedom that has been dealt with in Canadian Hungarian literature. For example, in Szohner's *The Immigrant*, Géza is thrilled to discover that in Canada it is permissible to scalp Diefenbaker on an election poster. In the old world there is more respect for the leaders of one's country. Similarly, many of the pleasures, conveniences and freedoms of North American society are regarded with great apprehension by Hungarian parents raised according to much less permissive standards. Also, the loss of the traditional obedience that children in Hungary were expected to show their parents is often portrayed in Canadian Hungarian writing.

Other, more complicated problems arise from this unlimited freedom, such as the retention by the immigrants of illusions and archaic ideals. An amusing and well-written short story by John Miska lays bare this dimension of Canadian Hungarian experience. Entitled "The Homecoming," it provides an ironic account of the return of an old-fashioned prewar communist named Máriás to socialist Hungary:

His thoughts travelled back to Toronto, to his two mortgage-free houses, to his family, and to the Workers' Lodge. That's where his home was, that's where he belonged. Its members were people sharing the same background, the same attitude to life. They were a small island to themselves where time had stood still for thirty-one odd years and where the Munkás [*sic*]¹⁶ provided the only line of communication with the outside world. The Workers' Lodge had in fact become the umbilical cord that tied them to the old country. In the summer they organized picnics, and parties at New Year's eve when all joined in to sing the Internationale at midnight. They were all heroes in their world of fantasy. (Translated by John Miska)¹⁷

Obviously disenchanted with what he sees in his homeland, comrade Máriás appropriately deals with his alienation by daydreaming about his comfortable life of illusion back in Canada!

To this point, the emphasis has been on value conflicts, which are perhaps the central, but hardly exclusive, concern of the literature that deals with the immigrant experience. It has been proposed that the concern with language maintenance, continental generalizations (Europe standing for Hungary, North America for Canada), cultural preservation and expansion acted out in fantasy, and the conservative view that too much freedom may threaten ethnic culture, are recognitions which probably distinguish Canadian Hungarian literature when compared to other ethnic literatures. The discussion has assumed that this generalized experience appears in literature and art in innumerable forms. Thus it would be useful to work out a classification scheme for this literature. It would also be useful to analyze the body of writing based on the immigrant experience within the framework of social and psychological correlates. It is, of course, an open question whether critics and historians of ethnic Canadian literature can meet the task. Can members of a particular ethnic group be objective enough to analyze their native literary roots in a scholarly manner? Given that research into ethnic literature in Canada is still in its infancy, it is likely that most scholars working in the area are at precisely the same point as is Canadian Hungarian literature: they are still trying to establish objective standards. Subjectively, I might add that this is still a very personal matter for me. In 1978, I received a grant from the Multiculturalism Directorate to research Canadian Hungarian literature. In my work, I used a variety of different approaches ranging from evaluation of resources to personal interviews with writers and poets. Especially in the course of the latter, I discovered how easy it was to confuse the empathy (intellectual identification) I felt with my subjects with sympathy (emotional identification). Canadian Hungarian authors are my

compatriots, and I share many of their frustrations and complexes. Yet at the same time I was acutely aware that if studies of ethnic literature were to win the respect of the academic community, researchers could not allow themselves to be over-emotional. The same qualitative standards should be applied to ethnic literature as to any other literature. The dispassionate evaluation of the intellectual mind is eventually more important than emotional identification.

Is there any indication that a deeper and more critical self-awareness is developing in Canadian Hungarian literary scholarship? Frankly, it is difficult to tell, but in Canadian Hungarian poetry there are signs of such a maturation. In his two recently published collections of poems, László Kemenes-Géfin (1937–), a prominent poet, analyzes the Hungarian mind from an ironic perspective that can only be attained by being twice removed from one's own situation: first, from the cradle of the old country and second, from the fantasy world of yesteryear's immigrants.¹⁸ György Vitéz has taken the same step in his latest volume.¹⁹ Thus, there seems to be hope that Canadian Hungarian writers can overcome their schizophrenic division into typical, almost ideal citizens in everyday life, and outsiders or "transients"—as Ödö Kiss refers to himself—in the depth of their soul and in their fantasies. Although still largely alienated as a group, Hungarian writers in Canada are at least becoming aware of their isolation and this could be the first step toward integration into the Canadian literary community. Much, however, remains to be done in establishing Canadian Hungarian literature as a distinct entity. In a very interesting paper on American Hungarian poetry, József Gellén, a scholar from Debrecen, Hungary, suggests that the fixation with the old country, typical of much emigrant literature, reflects the need to fill the threatening vacuum created by physical and cultural transposition. Gellén goes on to note, however, that in time a new identification and awareness arises, and that émigré poets and writers increasingly participate in the cultural and political life of their adopted land.²⁰ This appears to be the phase that Canadian Hungarian literature is presently entering. One suspects that the future is going to be very exciting, indeed!

Notes

1. This is, of course, a sweeping statement which could be substantiated only by a lengthy digression dwelling on the definition of literature. My thesis is this: before 1956, publications were issued at random. The poetry was semi-anonymous, folkloristic and aesthetically insignificant and the prose (after 1945) was propagandistic, anti-communist and, aesthetically,

equally insignificant. After 1956, both poetry and prose of respectable aesthetic quality were produced, and institutions of literary production and consumption (such as publishers, reading public and criticism) were increasingly developing. About earlier, "naïve" poetry, cf. M. L. Kovács, "Early Hungarian Canadian Culture," *Canadian-American Review of Hungarian Studies* 1 (1980): 55–76. About post-revolutionary developments, cf. J. Miska, "Modern Hungarian Poetry in Canada," *ibid.*, 77–83. The most comprehensive bibliography (351 entries) of Canadian Hungarian literature was compiled by J. Miska: *Ethnic and Native Canadian Literature, 1850–1979* (microfiche, Lethbridge, 1979).

2. "Üzenet az emigráns magyaroknak," in his volume *Emlékezzetek Magyarországra!* published under a pseudonym, Aladár Visegrádi, (Toronto: Weller, 1966), 89. Unless otherwise indicated, the translations are mine.
3. F. Fáy: "Az írást egyszer megtalálják," in a volume by the same title (Toronto: Magyar Kultura, 1959), 59.
4. A recent event: the publication of an anthology of "Western European and overseas Hungarian poets" (*Vándorének: nyugateurópai és tengerentúli magyar költők*, ed. M. Béládi; Budapest: Szépirodalmi Könyvkiadó, 1981), modifies this statement somewhat, although it remains to be seen whether this anthology will open new channels of mutual contact or will remain a lonely enterprise.
5. J. Miska, "A kanadai magyar irodalom két dimenziója," *Krónika* 2, 11, 7–9.
6. "Hir," *Nyugati magyar költők antológiája*, 1980, ed. L. Kemenes-Géfin (Bern, 1980), 364.
7. "Búcsúzás Le Havre-ban," in E. Németh, *Októberi árnyak* (Toronto: Patria, 1966).
8. "Valahol Newfoundland körül," *Emlékezzetek Magyarországra!* (pseud. A. Visegrádi), 28–9.
9. Originally published in the periodical *Nemzetör* (Munich); no publication data are available. English translation published in *The Sound of Time: Anthology of Canadian Hungarian Authors*, ed. J. P. Miska (Oakville: Sovereign Press, 1974), 171–2.
10. "Sorok a bedeszkHzott morton-i templomról," in O. Kiss, *Atutazóban a városomon* (Toronto: Weller, 1970), 13.
11. "Gyermekvers," in F. Fáy, *Aradás* (Toronto, 1972), 22–3.
12. "Amerika," in G. Vitéz, *Amerikai történet* (Paris: Magyar Műhely, 1975), 67–8.
13. "Levél Philadelphia polgármesteréhez," *Faludy György Összegyűjtött Versei* (New York: Püski, 1980), 436–9. English translation: *East and West: Selected Poems of George Faludy*, ed. J. R. Colombo (Toronto: Hounslow Press, 1978), 124.
14. "Faulkner órája," in J. Miska, *Egy bögre tej* (Ottawa, Munich, 1969), 111–17.

15. *Kigyúlt a fény* (Toronto: Kanadai Magyar Írók, 1972).
16. Refers to the *Kanadai Magyar Munkás* (Canadian Hungarian Worker), a conservative communist newspaper.
17. "Hazajáró," in *Egy bögre tej*, 89–103. English translation: *Sounds of Time*, quoted from 117.
18. *Pogány diaszpóra* (Toronto: Amerikai Magyar Írók, 1974).
19. *Missa agnostica* (Paris: Magyar Műhely, 1979).
20. J. Gellén, "Immigrant Experience in Hungarian-American Poetry Before 1945: A Preliminary Assessment," *Acta Litteraria Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae* 20, 1–2 (1978): 91–7.

Jars Balan

“A Word in a Foreign Language”: Ukrainian Influences in George Ryga’s Work

I first met George Ryga in the summer of 1972, when I became a student of his in the Creative Writing Department at the Banff School of Fine Arts. I had, of course, heard of him long before then, as he was already well-known in Canada as the author of such works as *Indian* (1964), *The Ecstasy of Rita Joe* (1967) and *Grass and Wild Strawberries* (1968). His most recent play, *Captives of the Faceless Drummer* (1971), was in the process of being mounted for Festival Lennoxville (having previously been performed in Vancouver and Toronto), and he was in the final stages of completing work on *Sunrise on Sarah* (1972) in preparation for its Banff *première*. Along with other members of the playwriting class, I sat in on the workshops and rehearsals of *Sunrise*, just as I observed the following year how *Portrait of Angelica* was reworked and prepared for performance.

Although I do not remember exactly when I first became aware that Ryga was a *nash*—literally “ours,” meaning someone of Ukrainian descent—it was before I met him in Banff and it certainly fed my curiosity about him. Being of Ukrainian ancestry myself, I was eager to find out how he had dealt with the experience of “growing up Ukrainian,” and especially wanted to know if and how his Ukrainian background had affected his work and outlook as a writer. I could say therefore that I have been researching this paper for as long as I have known George Ryga.

I must admit that initially I naively expected to find that we shared a lot in common despite the twenty-year difference in our ages: the same food, the same songs, the same history and at least a similar socialization within the Ukrainian community. But that, I soon discovered, was not the

case; if anything, we came from entirely different worlds and were shaped by completely different kinds of experiences. For instance, he grew up in a rural Ukrainian settlement in a then-remote part of northern Alberta during the Depression and the war years. I grew up in a suburban Jewish ghetto in north-central Toronto in the Cold War era and the affluent sixties. He was the son of immigrant farmers who had homesteaded in the Canadian wilderness; I was the son of a "mixed marriage" between a Ukrainian Canadian mother, born and raised in urban Ontario, and an immigrant father fresh from the displaced persons' camps of postwar Germany. Moreover, although we both had parents or grandparents who had come from Western Ukraine (and transplanted regional differences from the homeland can often divide ethnic communities along linguistic, religious and other lines), Ryga's family was active in the socialist wing of the Ukrainian community, whereas mine was active in the nationalist camp.

In becoming conscious of the implications of these and other contrasts between us, I came to realize that Ryga's understanding of Ukrainian identity was quite different from my own, and my current understanding of what it means to be Ukrainian owes much to my nine-year association with George Ryga. In the numerous conversations we had on the subject, he forced me to rethink many assumptions and romanticized conceptions that I had originally about my ethnic identity. Essentially, I had to redefine what I considered to be "Ukrainian" to be able to identify Ukrainian influences in George Ryga's writing.

Now, trying to define "Ukrainianness" is somewhat like trying to define "Canadianness" if you are a critic attempting to determine national characteristics in Canadian literature or a member of a panel of judges awarding a national literary prize. Inevitably, any definition will have problematic aspects to it since all questions of identity involve a strong subjective element and require sorting out of what are essentially very nebulous gestalts. However, it is possible to come up with a working interpretation that is comprehensible, if not totally acceptable, to most people. My understanding of what constitutes "Ukrainianness" in terms of George Ryga's writing will become apparent in the course of this paper, as it informs the approach and argument that I develop. Although it would no doubt be useful to elaborate on the conception of Ukrainian identity behind my analysis, the subject is an involved one and space does not permit its discussion here.

I would, however, like to acknowledge that I am aware that some Ukrainian Canadians—especially those from the post-Second World War immigration, who have very specific ideas about what criteria must be met for someone or something to be considered Ukrainian—will disagree with

the definition implicit in my analysis. Similarly, I am sure that others will want to argue that some of the Ukrainian influences I identify are really more general ethnic ones that are not specific to any single minority group. I think that such objections are moot since broader considerations about ethnicity are ultimately based upon a particular experience, which in George Ryga's case I define as Ukrainian. It is against this background that I turn to the issue of Ukrainian influences in George Ryga's writing.

What is to be gained from identifying ethnic influences in a writer's work? The most immediate and obvious answer is a better understanding of that writer's work, which in itself may be enough to validate the expenditure of intellectual energy. However, it can be argued further that in a specifically Canadian context, much more potentially can be obtained from an "ethnic approach," namely, a better understanding of one of the seminal elements shaping our still youthful culture. For it is a fact verging on cliché that we are overwhelmingly a nation of immigrants, just as it is a fact that fully one quarter of us come from non-Anglo-Celtic and non-French backgrounds. If studies of the influence of ethnicity on Canadian writers with minority-culture ancestries can add in any way to our knowledge of the whole of Canadian literature, they must be considered useful and worth encouraging. Moreover, because of the important role played by literature in the formation of national identities, one could even speculate that such endeavours might make meaningful contributions toward the pursuit of our holy grail, the elusive substance of Canadian identity. Although this paper makes no claims as regards the latter quest, it does seek to demonstrate that the work of other Canadian writers might yield valuable critical insights if similarly viewed through an ethnic paradigm.

The next question that arises logically is whether George Ryga's work lends itself to examination using an "ethnic approach"? Even a cursory survey of his writings reveals that they contain enough ethnic content to establish suitability. Furthermore, his own background suggests that he could be an interesting candidate for such an analysis.

Ryga was born in 1932 to immigrant parents who had come to Canada four years earlier from the western Ukrainian province of Galicia. He was raised, along with his sister, in the small farming community of Richmond Park, Alberta, where all his immediate neighbours were also Ukrainian. Consequently, Ryga spent the early years of his life in an environment where he heard only the Ukrainian language. His first, traumatic contact with the English-speaking world came on the day he started school, an event which he has described in the following anecdote.

I was six years old when I entered the public school system and I remember

the first words I heard were 'Good morning.' It was like a hammer blow—I had never heard an English word up to that time . . . ¹

Clearly, the impact of this collision with another culture made a powerful impression on the young George Ryga, and this paper will contend that he is still clashing with the alien world he first encountered as a child.

Such biographical details notwithstanding, it is George Ryga's literary works which reveal Ukrainian influences best. He wrote two television dramas on identifiably Ukrainian themes—"Ninth Summer," his adaptation of an incident from *Ballad of a Stonepicker*, and "1927," the Ivan Lypa segment in "The Newcomers" series—as well as two novels with Ukrainian Canadian settings, *Hungry Hills* and *Ballad of a Stonepicker*. Many of his plays and works of fiction are also populated by a variety of Ukrainian or Slavic figures, who seem to appear with almost tell-tale regularity in even the most unlikely stories. In addition to the Bayracks, Ruptashs, Zaharchuks, Sadowniks, Makars and Burlas of *Ballad of a Stone Picker*, and Joe Skrypka and his friend Nick in *Hungry Hills*, we encounter a Michael J. Tomaschuk in *Sunrise on Sarah*, a Grace Stefanyk in *Portrait of Angelica*, and a colourful, if somewhat confused, character named Romeo Kuchmir in the novel *Night Desk*. In a similar vein we find such characters as Guza in *Paracelsus*, and Radomsky and Goyda in *Seven Hours to Sundown*, integrated into contexts that are not specifically associated with Slavs. Ryga simply draws on types familiar from his own Slavic background. However, one suspects—particularly in the case of Betty Guza, the Polish Canadian woman doctor in *Paracelsus*—that his invention of characters is not always a matter of convenience or unconscious inclination.

It is also worth noting that Ryga has worked with Toronto's Shevchenko Ensemble, has had intermittent contact with the writers' union in Soviet Ukraine and in 1968 had both of his Ukrainian Canadian novels issued in Ukrainian translation by the Dnipro publishers of Kiev.² In short, he has always had some sort of contact with the Ukrainian community-at-large, thereby acknowledging his Ukrainian background.

But any attempt to draw a direct link between Ryga's writing and the literary tradition in Ukraine must fall before Ryga's own explanation that he has no formal education in or great familiarity with Ukrainian literature. Not a single Ukrainian is mentioned among the writers he lists as having influenced him most in his youth:

Byron, Keats, Shelley, Burns, Dickens, William Morris, Walt Whitman, Karl Marx, Shakespeare, Goethe, William Carlos Williams, Hikmet, Ehrenberg and the magnificent Nikos Kazantzakis!³

But though Ryga had no formal opportunity to study the great writers of the Ukrainian tradition, he did make this revealing observation, in an interview with Peter Hay, about his 1955 trip to Britain:

I had some self-assigned tasks: I wanted to explore the countryside of Robert Burns to try to understand better how a writer evolved language. At that time there were two writers in my mind who had a very special significance. One of them was Burns, the other one the Ukrainian poet Sevchenko [*sic*]. Both of them did the same thing with language: they elevated it, they took it from a very colloquial form into a new art form . . .⁴

Clearly, then, Ryga has not been totally unaware of the Ukrainian literary heritage. He has read works by several Ukrainian writers, even though in his own creations he has never drawn upon Ukrainian literary traditions systematically. Ryga's work may, of course, be examined against the backdrop of Ukrainian literature—and, indeed, such an approach might well produce some useful insights but that task is not the concern of this paper.

During Ryga's formative years (the 1930s and 1940s), there was a dynamic Ukrainian theatre in Canada in both the bloc settlements of the prairies and the Ukrainian ghettos in urban centres. Dozens of amateur and semi-professional Ukrainian drama groups performed not only traditional and translated works brought over from Ukraine, but also original plays by Ukrainian Canadian playwrights on indigenous Canadian themes. From this, one might speculate that Ryga's interest in writing plays had been stimulated by contact or involvement with the Ukrainian theatre in Canada. Such, however, was not the case. Although there was a drama group at the Richmond Park community hall built by the Prosvita Society in 1933, it had little impact upon the young George Ryga.⁵ In an interview, Ryga indicated that cultural life in the settlement was extremely limited in the early years because of the strenuous demands of pioneering. He also pointed out that since the tiny Richmond Park colony was outside the large Ukrainian bloc settlements of northeastern Alberta, it received very few of the entertainers, lecturers or even politicians who travelled through Ukrainian communities in the days of the Depression. Interestingly, the most memorable socio-cultural events from Ryga's childhood were the occasional visits from touring evangelists, who, notwithstanding the great religious and linguistic differences, were well received because the songs and fervent sermons provided a welcome relief from the monotony of rural life.

Digging deeper into the less conscious and more indirect influences on Ryga's creative inspiration, it is possible to detect Ryga's distinctly Slavic "conceptual map" of our world. In its most obvious manifestations this map may be seen in the numerous Soviet and East European place names that crop up in his plays and stories. For many people in the West, the area beyond central Europe is one grey Russian mass, but Ryga is quite at home in that territory bound by the Carpathian and Ural mountains, and the Baltic and Black seas. Poland, Czechoslovakia, Lithuania and Hungary are not the exotic words in his vocabulary that they often are for writers of West European origin; they are familiar places because they are near Russia and Ukraine. For instance, when Paracelsus, who is Swiss, refers to Greeks, Lithuanians, Magyars and Turks to illustrate a point he is making with his assistant, Franz, one is struck by the fact that all the peoples mentioned have long historical links with Ukraine. And we shall soon see that in his vocabulary, too, his choice of words may not be as random as it appears to be.

This conceptual map is also behind the many Slavic characters encountered in Ryga's works. What is more interesting, however, is that Ryga provides details of Slavic backgrounds for characters whose ethnicity is seemingly unimportant. We learn in an offhand manner that Lee, in *Sunrise on Sarah*, is the son of a prostitute from Bratislava, and that Susan in *Grass and Wild Strawberries* has a Russian great-aunt named Parasa. In providing such details, Ryga is not only giving his characters a history that invests them with greater depth, but is also revealing something about his distinctly Slavic perception of geography.

Ryga's conceptual map shows itself in yet another striking way. In *Grass and Wild Strawberries* there is a heated political discussion between an old socialist uncle and his hippie nephew, in which the latter refers bitterly to young communists dying in Czechoslovakia "defending their right to live away from mother."⁶ This is both a timely reference to events happening in that part of the world (the play was written in 1968), and an indication of Ryga's particular interest in Soviet politics. Under sharp questioning about the nature of the Warsaw Pact bureaucracies, the hippie's uncle is hard pressed to provide answers. In a similar exchange in *Captives of the Faceless Drummer*, Canadian socialists are challenged indirectly to take a principled position on the Soviet Union:

Harry:

Now where do you stand politically? Just what is your position on the riots and political violence in the socialist countries?

CHORUS enters as dancers, moving through combative motions by cartwheeling of flags—red banners, swastikas, peace flags—to the rhythm of staccatic, machine-gun like percussion instruments, such as small drums. They dance in background.

Commander:

Whatever kills me is asking for a beating . . . I don't know my next door neighbour . . . I don't know what the Poles or Swedes are doing . . . I don't worry for the world no more . . . I worry for me now and everybody who's like me!⁷

Commander fails, as so much of the orthodox Canadian left has failed, to deal honestly with problematic aspects of socialist societies like the Soviet Union. His reply to Harry is a classic evasion of responsibility, which takes on additional meaning when one takes into account that Ryga quit the Communist party in protest after the invasion of Hungary in 1956.

It could be argued that in taking up these concerns, Ryga places himself well within the long tradition of the Ukrainian left in Canada. On numerous occasions Ukrainian socialists have led the opposition to the Moscow-directed leadership of the Canadian Communist party, followed by expulsion or exodus from the ranks. No wholesale rejection of socialist ideals necessarily followed, just as Ryga did not abandon his commitment to the struggle for social justice. His consistency as a social critic is shown by his denunciation of "red fascism" in *Beyond the Crimson Morning*.⁸

But perhaps the most revealing manifestation of Ryga's specifically political conceptual map is in his play *Paracelsus*. No Ukrainian nationalist should have difficulty recognizing the significance of the following discussion, for it addresses the problem that is at the very core of the Ukrainian question:

Paracelsus:

You have a habit, Franz,
For using Latin names for ailments in a German body!
I knew a poet in Bavaria,
Who wrote his thoughts in Greek,
Believing this gave them dignity. An elevation!

Franz:

I do feel that in medicine and in gentler arts,
German is a minor tongue . . .

Paracelsus:

What a strange judgment you place
On the German word . . . and on yourself!

Franz:

How so, Theophrastus?

Paracelsus:

A man who trades his language
Might in time trade his home and motherland
For valueless refinements . . .
Do not let the edicts of some mighty, distant empire
Rule your thoughts, or *how you speak them!*
That is the first threshold you must cross
On the rugged road to freedom . . .
Be a Greek or Lithuanian, Magyar or a Turk . . .
Whatever womb your mother bore you from—
Be that first!

Franz:

But in medicine . . .

Paracelsus:

Is mystery?

Franz:

To the common people—yes!

Paracelsus:

Medicine, above all else—must nevermore
Be closeted in secrecy,
Either in language or its truths
From the common man and woman—
For as healing rises from the people
So must it be given back to people!
The healer understanding this
Has reached the first plateau
Of nobility among the human species!⁹

Although it is possible to interpret the above as an indirect comment on the American domination of Canadian culture, it is much more appropriate to substitute "Ukrainian" and "Russian" for "German" and "Latin." Language is not at the heart of the issue of American cultural imperialism, but it is central to the problem of Russian chauvinism within the Soviet

Union. The allusion to the Russian Revolution in the pantomime performed by the chorus in the opening scene, and the other Slavic references and equivocations in the play support the contention that Ryga is consciously addressing in *Paracelsus* the situation of Ukraine and other non-Russian republics in the Soviet Union.

But even though *Paracelsus* touches on the national question, which is of such importance to all politically conscious Ukrainians, it is not the prime concern of the linguistic theme developed in the play. The problem of language is treated more generally in other parts, where Ryga portrays the great healer as a champion of the vernacular over the "Latin mumbo-jumbo"¹⁰ of the priests and the ruling intellectual elite. It is significant that Paracelsus makes a point of informing his students that he teaches in "the simple German tongue"¹¹ they all learned at birth. But a complete statement of his sympathies emerges from another of his lectures:

*For one week, I was blessed with such companions
As to more than compensate for all the hungers
Of my life!
We drank, ate, sang village songs
In the language and dialect of the countryside
Often, our food and drink would scarce be touched
In the heat of argument on the future courses
Of our skills as men of medicine . . .
Or the turmoil of the country,
Where peasants were wakening
From their sleep of centuries
And demanding land and bread,
Which was their right, as toilers of the earth.¹²*

Obviously, Paracelsus' loyalties are entirely with the common and oppressed people of the earth—the peasantry—and the fact of this allegiance is driven home repeatedly by Ryga in the course of the play. Important peasant rebellions are symbolically acted out at the beginning of the play, and Paracelsus' earthy sense of humour, his appreciation of "country" music and his generally unadorned character identify him totally with the peasant class and their struggles. It could be argued that Ryga is essentially inverting some of the traditional *Faust* interpretations of the great medieval heretic by sympathetically depicting him as a radical populist who was persecuted because of his rejection of aristocratic

ideology and its cultural refinements.

The decision to recast the controversial figure of Faustus assumes even greater significance, however, when considered in the light of Ryga's childhood in Richmond Park. In an interview with his biographer, Peter Hay, Ryga provides the following description of life in the isolated Alberta community:

It was very primitive; in essence life hadn't changed from what it was in the 17th century in Eastern Europe . . . A lot of the impressions of how people live when reduced to bare essentials still persist in my mind . . .¹³

He provides additional insights into his early years in "Notes from a Silent Boyhood," where he makes the following observations about his education:

. . . . I was spanning generations with each year I spent in that drafty log building with the warping floors and the gasoline-barrel heater, listening but seldom hearing the droning new teacher with frayed cuffs and chalkstains on the shiny seat of his trousers Sometimes I stared into the face above me—an ashen face crying out for the outdoors and the sun of summer; crying out for acceptance in the community, for love and children of his own. A face I could sadden with disobedience and indifference, which I often did. For he was in the nineteenth century, pulling me, resisting and unco-operative out of the seventeenth century.¹⁴

In short, Ryga sees himself as having had the unusual experience of being a peasant in twentieth-century Canada.

And, indeed, it is not difficult to understand this sentiment if one visits Richmond Park, even today. Although it is now easily accessible (if somewhat difficult to find) by car, Richmond Park in the thirties, because of its location on the north side of the formidable Athabasca River, was effectively isolated from contact with most of the world. A bridge had not yet linked the community with the town of Athabasca on the southern bank, and Ryga still remembers the days when footpaths, not roads, joined together the scattered homesteads and north-bank settlements. The forest still looms at the edge of the fields the way it looms in Margaret Atwood's "Susanna Moodie" poems, and it is not difficult to imagine what an arduous job land clearing would have been before the day of bulldozers, brushcutters, chain saws and mechanical stonepickers. In this context, it is not far-fetched to claim that Ryga had the unique experience of "pioneering" when it was already only a memory in most other parts of Canada.

There are several literary consequences that stem from the fact that Ryga's life-style in his youth had much in common with that of his peasant ancestors in Ukraine. First and foremost, there is Ryga's obvious and strong identification with peasants and country people, as expressed in *Paracelsus* and such prose works as *Ballad of a Stonepicker* and *Night Desk*. It is especially evident in Ryga's early novel, *Hungry Hills* (1960), where the narrator speaks of never being able to lose his "staggering, long-stepped country walk,"¹⁵ and in Ryga's most recent book, *Beyond the Crimson Morning*, where Ryga-as-narrator refers to the Chinese peasantry on several occasions with a sympathy, interest and insight rare among Western observers of that country.

It is perhaps timely to consider the following comparison between Ryga and the Spanish dramatist Garcia Lorca made by Brian Parker in his excellent introduction to *The Ecstasy of Rita Joe and other plays*:

Both write mainly peasant tragedy, concerned with life which is close to the crude, but sometimes ennobling, bases of existence, particularly as these are revealed in the lives of the dispossessed-Lorca's gypsies and frustrated women, Ryga's Indians and labourers. Both are concerned with the problem of individual integrity, and tend to exalt instinct as a key to the meaning of life and to man's relationship with nature—though Ryga is uneasy with such a conclusion. And in both this gives a sense of Fate which finds expression in quasi-religious symbolism. Technically, both try to mix realism and lyricism, and extend the lyrical dimension by manipulation of the visual and musical elements of theatre. The structure of their plays thus becomes poetic rather than logical, with a narrative form which is less concerned with the cause and effect of action than with imaginative effects that can be obtained by juxtaposition, sharp transitions, symbolism, and the counterpointing and development of themes, as in music.¹⁶

Parker then argues that "Ryga's, in fact, is basically an *oral* art, a development of the popular arts of storyteller and folksinger to the scale of novel or play."¹⁷ Equally perceptive are his observations about the way George Ryga writes:

... chiefly he relies on the popular sensitivity of music for a universalizing form, which, transferred to the visual plane, emerges as dance—his constant symbol for the joy in life which opposes disillusion and the ethic of work.

These tendencies in Ryga's drama undoubtedly spring from his upbringing in the Ukrainian farming community of northern Alberta, with its antimonies of backbreaking labour and communal dancing and song; but they were also, as certainly, encouraged by his apprenticeship in radio and television. Like the ballad, radio and television are basically oral forms, encouraging a collage of short scenes, juxtaposed and intercut, emphasizing

close-up, extremely flexible in the handling of place and time, and overlaying dialogue with music and sound effects, and in television with backprojections and split-screen images.¹⁸

Parker has pinpointed the source of some of the technical and structural preferences that characterize Ryga's work. The exuberant use of song and dance in Ryga's plays and the unrestrained poetry of so much of his dialogue and prose give his work an unmistakable folk flavour that can prove to be too sharp for certain refined palates. But folk is the idiom that Ryga knows best and seems to work most comfortably in. He is at ease as a storyteller or performer on stage. Parker has correctly described Ryga's creations for the theatre as "ballad plays," for they inhabit a space that is aurally conceived rather than visualized. An important part of Ryga is still intimately linked with the experience of growing up in northern Alberta.

Although he quite obviously feels a strong sense of kinship with rural people, what is not often as apparent is that Ryga also shares with them a particular kind of alienation from urban and industrial society. More specifically, Ryga's farm background (making him part of a diminishing species) and the fact of his ethnicity provide him with a source of tension that he both explores and expresses in his art.

Of course, it is a truism that all artists are to some extent alienated from the masses, just as it is a truism that most people today feel a measure of displacement and angst. However, Ryga's particular sense of being an outsider can be attributed to a specific cause. Consider this passage from *Captives of the Faceless Drummer*, where the wife of the hostage diplomat, in a flash-back to the early days of their marriage, remarks:

... If your first posting was to be an under-developed country ... or better still, some relevant work among the poor here ... perhaps the Indians or Metis ... or a farming community with an eastern European population ... community development is as important as foreign diplomacy, don't you agree?¹⁹

In this ironic, almost sarcastic, stab at liberalism, we get a good indication of one of the memories that sticks in Ryga's throat.

Similarly, in the play *Seven Hours to Sundown* we find the following exchange between two of the main characters: Sid Kiosk, the mayor of a small town embroiled in a political controversy, and Tom Rossini, an alderman:

Kiosk:

When I was a kid ... it was the English remittance men an' their kids who did it to us. Next, it'll be you As a kid, if I invited their kids to my birthday party, they never came I stood behind trees, watching them ... a goddamned second-class citizen in my own country I'm never gonna forget that!

Rossini:

What's it got to do with me? You don't hear me crying about things like that It doesn't bother Goyda ... or your daughter. Certainly not the newspaper lady. Nobody cares about the dreams of old men, Kiosk! You pay for what you need, that's all that matters. If you can't pay, that's another thing ... then you're a bum.

Kiosk:

They call you the Italian behind your back. You want to be called that all your life?

Rossini: laughing

I don't care what in hell they call me. I own more than I can eat ... putting my kid through university I've even had enough friends to elect me to town council. So, do I worry? If I was an Indian or a cripple, maybe I'd worry ... but I'm not.

Kiosk:

No pride at all, eh? ... I've got pride, Rossini. I don't take crap from anyone no more ... not even from my daughter. An' certainly not from an educated bum who can do better things, but goes into a business a woman or somebody with less education could do. He's takin' away someone else's work!²⁰

Rossini, it is true, may not give a damn if people call him the Italian behind his back, but Ryga certainly leaves no doubt as to where he stands on the sensitive issue of prejudice. The next quotation is also taken from *Seven Hours to Sundown*:

Kiosk:

Remittance men Lazy, insolent Englishmen who came to this country with a monthly retainer of money to keep them here. My old man came over as a working immigrant. *They* came like royalty ... bought up the best farming land an' left it in bush. My old man wants to farm, but he gets the gravel to farm on. They bring their relatives over on holidays ... drive up to our farm an' show us off as if we were their hired labour! They never learned

to say my old man's name, even though he emigrated from the same country they did "Hey, chappie," they'd call to him, an' wag their forefingers as if they were calling a dog "Hey, chappie, come over and mow my lawn tomorrow." . . . an' he did. Goddamn him, but he did!²¹

Discrimination is a matter of particular concern to Ryga and he confronts the issue with almost brutal honesty in *Seven Hours to Sundown*. He deals with it in a more subtle way, however, in a moving scene in one of his novels. *Night Desk* is about a burly Edmonton fight promoter named Romeo Kuchmir, who relates the following story in a poignant reminiscence that takes him back to his childhood. Kuchmir begins by describing how as a young boy he had once spent the better part of a day gathering mushrooms for his ailing country-school teacher and her two children:

"I picked them for you," I says, holdin' out the two pails of mushrooms. She looks at them, then at me. Somethin' was wrong, she wasn't sure . . .

"Do . . . you people eat this?" she asks.

"Huh?"

By now, the two kids are beside her. They looked hungry an' worried.

"Do . . . Ukrainians eat these?"

"Sure, all kinds of people eat mushrooms. Cows eat 'em too!" I says.

"You've eaten them yourself?"

"Yep."

"Then perhaps you had better take them home for your mother," she says, blinkin' with the pain in her head.

"No. They're for you . . . "

"I don't want them. I'm sorry!" Her voice gets high an' sharp all of a sudden. I'm still a kid. I don't know what to do, so I hold up the pails to her. She takes them an' marches down the steps an' to the corner of the house where a small lilac bush is growin'. She lifts the pails one at a time an' empties them around the roots of the bush. Then she kicks some dead grass an' rotten leaves over them an' hands me back the empty pails.²²

One suspects from the vividness of this account that it may have had an autobiographical source. But what is significant in all the passages cited above is that they reveal that Ryga bears some of the scars that many of his generation acquired in the process of growing up as "bohunks" in an Anglo world. The almost painfully intimate quality of each of the examples provided leaves no doubt as to their ultimate origin in Ryga's personal experience. He is clearly writing as a victim and not as an intellectual sympathizer when he takes up the problem of discrimination. This is not to

say that his handling of the issue of prejudice is simplistic or morally self-righteous; the *Night Desk* incident shows a sensitivity that does not permit any superficial or black-and-white conclusions.

In *Hungry Hills* the narrator speaks of having the "bone of the outcast stuck in his throat" throughout his childhood.²³ All the evidence suggests that this feeling of "otherness" can be traced directly back to Ryga's own "silent boyhood" in northern Alberta. The following flash-back in *Beyond the Crimson Morning* reveals how powerful a role Richmond Park memories continue to play in George Ryga's understanding of himself:

Twenty-five years ago one autumn in northern Alberta. A bumper grain crop and a shortage of farm labor to harvest it. I was a junior employee at a commercial radio station in the city; a first-generation wage earner in a family whose long history in Europe did not evolve beyond neo-feudalism. The seasons of each year in my early life were the times of seeding, growth, and harvests.

A telephoned message left on my desk said: "Heavy frost last night. We need help."

That evening I was riding back to the community of my birth on an unpaid, unscheduled holiday which my co-workers in the city neither understood nor sanctioned.

What a peculiar thing to do—go out and help farmers take crops in. Farmers never come to the city to help merchants.²⁴

All the ghosts of Ryga's past—the feeling he is a "country hick" and some sort of "strange ethnic"—surface in this fleeting reminiscence. Clearly, he is still in the process of dealing with the fundamental facts of his background and identity.

But his continual sifting of such memories is not simply a matter of self-exorcism by means of literature. Ryga uses his experience as a victim and outsider in creating the many rebels, misfits and anachronistic survivors in his plays and stories. His vantage point from the periphery of Canadian society enables him to get inside the marginal characters that are at the centre of so many of his works. This is especially true in *Indian* and *The Ecstasy of Rita Joe*, where Ryga portrays the plight of Canada's native peoples with a veracity that leads many people to assume that he himself is of Indian or Metis ancestry. Ryga has commented on more than one occasion that in the Alberta he grew up in, Ukrainians and Indians were regarded as equals—i.e., as inferiors—by the socio-economically dominant "white" majority. His observation is further illuminated by Margaret Atwood's assertion, in her critical study, *Survival*, that "In Canadian literature the place of the low man on the totem pole *within* the

society is reserved for the Indian."²⁵ In Ryga's case it is obvious that he exploits his own minority status as a vehicle of understanding. He is that "word/in a foreign language" that Atwood concretizes in her poem "Disembarking at Quebec,"²⁶ and this allows him to get inside such diverse characters as Paracelsus, Romeo Kuchmir, Rita Joe, Commander, Sid Kosik and Sarah (in *Sunrise on Sarah*).

It should be more than evident by now that Ryga's *sensibility* as a writer has been profoundly shaped by his ethnic and rural inheritances. Yet it would be a mistake to claim that George Ryga is a *Ukrainian* writer, or that an understanding of his *Ukrainianness* will provide one with some sort of all-purpose critical key in analyzing his art and craft. The main objective of this paper is not to assert that Ryga is a "Ukrainian," "Ukrainian Canadian" or even "ethnic" writer—assuming such designations would be meaningful or helpful—but to show how his rural Ukrainian Canadian background consistently percolates much of his creative work. If anything, Ryga must be considered as a committedly *Canadian* writer, because he has always fought for the creation of an indigenous Canadian culture and has identified himself totally with this land and its peoples.

One last point, however, needs to be made about the Ukrainian concerns and influences in George Ryga's writing. As he has many creative years ahead of him it seems reasonable to expect that he will produce other works that could one day be incorporated within such a paper as this. Certainly, the following passage from *Beyond the Crimson Morning* would suggest that Ryga has not yet exhausted specifically Ukrainian subject matter in his writing. Standing on the Great Wall of China, he looks westward and reflects:

Ahead of me, in the burning cauldron of desert and wind, is my ancestral homeland. Longing and remorse, hot and throbbing as a fresh wound, spreads outward through my body. My hands and feet burn. I sob with pain and sudden tears fill my eyes.

"I will return. But not yet," I hear myself say. Through my tears, the landscape dances and diffuses into horsemen, their sabers gleaming, their voices a shrill metallic cry of battle as their numbers darken the horizon. They come toward me and stop, as if in review. Then fire. Their battle cry becomes deafening as they turn and gallop westward toward the steppes of Russia, then southward into the scented, soft underbelly of Asia Minor, whose songs, gray facades of buildings, and winding dusty streets have been the setting of most private dreams since infancy. I have told no one about them, not even my mother. It was there I went in my troubled world of sleep to announce my triumphs. It was there I returned in delirious illness to find comfort and medication of which no one near me in this world knew²⁷

Notes

1. Quoted by Peter Hay in "George Ryga: Beginnings of a Biography," *Canadian Theatre Review* (Summer 1979): 39.
2. Dz. Ryha, "Ballada pro Zbyracha Kaminnia" and "Holodni Hory," in *Romany i povisti* (Kiev) (December 1968).
3. G. Ryga, "Notes from a Silent Boyhood," *Cloves and Wild Strawberries: A History of the Schools of the County of Athabasca*, edited by G. Opryshko, compiled by the Athabasca Local of the Alberta Teachers Association, 1976, 9.
4. Quoted by Hay in "George Ryga: Beginnings of a Biography," 42.
5. "Richmond Park," *Ukrainians in Alberta* (Edmonton: Editorial Committee of the Ukrainian Pioneers' Association of Alberta, 1975), 41.
6. G. Ryga, *Grass and Wild Strawberries* in *The Ecstasy of Rita Joe and other plays* (Toronto: new press, 1971), 162-3.
7. G. Ryga, *Captives of the Faceless Drummer*, 3d ed. (Vancouver: Talonbooks, 1974), 39-40.
8. G. Ryga, *Beyond the Crimson Morning* (Toronto: Doubleday, 1979), 42.
9. G. Ryga, *Paracelsus* in *Canadian Theatre Review* (Fall 1974): 89-91.
10. *Ibid.*, 51.
11. *Ibid.*, 57.
12. *Ibid.*, 76.
13. Quoted by Hay in "George Ryga: Beginnings of a Biography," 39.
14. G. Ryga, "Notes from a Silent Boyhood," 10.
15. G. Ryga, *Hungry Hills* (Vancouver: Talonbooks, 1974), 20.
16. B. Parker, "The Ballad-Plays of Ryga," *The Ecstasy of Rita Joe and other plays* (Toronto: new press, 1971), vii.
17. *Ibid.*, viii.
18. *Ibid.*, ix.
19. Ryga, *Captives of the Faceless Drummer*, 91.
20. G. Ryga, *Seven Hours to Sundown* (Vancouver: Talonbooks, 1977), 98-9.
21. *Ibid.*, 25-6.
22. G. Ryga, *Night Desk* (Vancouver: Talonbooks, 1976), 27-8.
23. G. Ryga, *Hungry Hills*, 14.
24. G. Ryga, *Beyond the Crimson Morning*, 56-7.
25. M. Atwood, *Survival* (Toronto: Anansi, 1972), 97.
26. M. Atwood, "Disembarking at Quebec," *The Journals of Susanna Moodie* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1970), 11.
27. Ryga, *Beyond the Crimson Morning*, 52-3.

David Arnason

Icelandic Canadian Literature

The Icelandic immigrants who first came to Canada in 1875 shared with other immigrant communities the difficulties of carving out a new life in a strange and often hostile landscape. Like other ethnic immigrants, they faced the problem of learning a new language and of adopting customs that were strange to them. There are, however, some fundamental differences between the Icelanders and other immigrant groups, and it is important to understand the differences in order to understand the nature of the Icelandic contribution to Canadian literature.

First, the Icelanders do not represent a single fragment of the home culture, as for instance groups who came to Canada to escape religious persecution, peasant groups or ambitious middle class groups. The Icelanders came to Canada because a volcano had erupted, leaving thousands of people homeless. The volcano, however, did not choose a single group. It left the wealthy as homeless as the poor, the merchant as homeless as the farmer, the skilled tradesman as homeless as the unskilled labourer. When the Canadian government offered land and assistance, the group that arrived represented a fair cross-section of Icelandic society. The poor faced the difficulties of the past everywhere, whereas the wealthy soon found that their money could buy their comfort and prestige in Canada as easily as elsewhere. The community brought with it all the tensions of Icelandic society, their religious and political controversies, and the class prejudices and resentments. It is therefore difficult to think of the experience of the Icelandic immigrants as a single experience. For some, it was a hard and brutal experience; for others, it was little more than a series of discomforts more than adequately compensated for by new advantages.

What the group did share, however, was an enormous respect for education, knowledge and literature. None of the immigrants who arrived was illiterate since there was no illiteracy in the Iceland they left. Within three years of their arrival the community had two Icelandic newspapers, fiercely arguing the controversies they had brought with them. The settlers wrote stories, poems, diaries and long letters home describing the experience of the new land. There has rarely been a group that has so thoroughly translated its experience into written language. From the beginning, the Icelandic community has regarded the role of the writer with respect.

Finally, the Icelandic Canadian experience, at least as far as it concerns literature, is over. The Icelanders were one of the first ethnic communities in Canada, and the current generation is the fifth generation in Canada. There was only one significant period of immigration, and no further infusions of the Icelandic culture. There are now no significant or even serious writers in Canada who write in Icelandic. A look at the history of Icelandic writing in Canada may therefore be an interesting way of predicting the future of other ethnic literary communities who are in an earlier stage of development.

The experience of the Icelandic Canadian community is a typical Canadian experience because it is an immigrant experience. The fundamental experience of all groups, including the French and English, is the complex and traumatic experience of being uprooted and finding new roots. The details of the experience may vary from group to group but the broad patterns are always the same.

The first generation of immigrants of any group necessarily regards itself as belonging to the nationality of the country from which it has immigrated. The first immigrants from England to Canada did not regard themselves as Canadians, but as Englishmen living in a new land. The sense of history of this first generation of immigrants is the sense of history of the mother country, and not of Canada. Naturally, they regard whatever writing they do as part of the tradition out of which they have evolved and they regard their writings as participation in the old culture from a distance. Once the immigrant cuts himself off from the place of his tradition, however, he begins to experience a number of changes. He ceases, for instance, to be intimately aware of change and development in the literary traditions of the homeland because of his physical distance from and difficulties in communication with the homeland, and because of his participation in a culture that is distinctly different. The immigrant, now faced with different and often nearly incomprehensible experiences, tends to group with others of his kind and to honour and revere aspects of the culture from which he has come. In fact, he honours the motherland

with an intensity that he might never have felt at home.

Inevitably though, with time, changes occur both at home and in the mother culture. However much the writer tries to maintain his contact with his mother culture, he moves away from it by his reactions to events, objects and relationships in the new world. At the same time the old culture moves away from the position that the immigrant understood, as it undergoes its own development. The England that lived in the memory of the earliest English immigrants was the England that they had left. Successive generations inherited that memory but at the same time England changed, and the England remembered from Canada was not the England that any English Canadian would confront upon his return. The same of course is true with the Icelandic Canadian experience. The Iceland remembered by the people who left to make a home in this country was the Iceland of 1875. The memories they passed on to their children and their children's children are memories of that Iceland. But over the years Iceland went through as marked and as spectacular changes as did Canada. The result, and it has been an inevitable result, has been a gradual separation of the two traditions. Any study of Icelandic literature must understand this. The first generation of Icelandic Canadian writers were a generation of Icelanders writing out of an Icelandic experience in Canada. They are not yet Canadian writers. The next generation, Canadian-born, were no longer Icelanders, but Canadians with very strong ties to Iceland. Succeeding generations progressively moved to participation in a literary tradition that was English rather than Icelandic. As they changed the language of their work from Icelandic to English they began to participate in a quite different tradition. Icelandic Canadian writers, then, belong essentially to three groups: Icelandic writers writing from abroad; transitional figures caught between two worlds; and Canadian writers with an affectionate interest in their Icelandic heritage.

It is difficult for me, as it is for any Canadian, to understand and comment on works written in Icelandic in this country. First, the Icelandic language is complex and subtle, the literary heritage is deep and sophisticated. If writing in Icelandic is to be assessed, it must be in terms of its contribution to the Icelandic literary heritage and in terms of its handling of the subtleties and nuances of the Icelandic language. Only someone deeply immersed in the culture of Iceland itself is qualified to make that kind of judgment and very few Canadians are. It will not do either to make judgments on the basis of the translations currently available. Translation is always a difficult art and what is lost in the translation is usually the poetry, the soul of the work. Icelandic is particularly difficult to translate because of its deceptive similarities to English. It is difficult enough simply to capture the meaning and the subtle range of connotation

and reference carried in the Icelandic language in any translation into English. It is nearly impossible both to do this and to bring into English poetry the complex flow and gradation of sounds, the sophisticated alliterative patterns and the subtle changes in quality and tone that constitute the music of the Icelandic language. The rhythm of modern English poetry has a very different sound. Icelandic poetry might perhaps be translated well into Anglo-Saxon. It can hardly be translated into modern English. The danger always exists that what is original and compelling in the Icelandic will become weak and diffuse in the English. Words do not have a one-to-one correspondence. In order to capture all the suggestions contained in one word in Icelandic, it may be necessary to use four or five words in English. As a result of this, the poem may lose a lot of its verve, compactness and idiomatic force. Unfortunately, most of the translations of Icelandic Canadian poetry that exist suffer from two problems. The first is that the translators have been so concerned with fidelity to the original that the English poetry produced as a translation is clumsy and awkward. Second, most of the translators hold deeply conservative notions about English poetry and have tended to translate not into a modern form, but into nineteenth-century Tennysonian verse. There could hardly be a vehicle less likely to carry a successful translation.

Of the first generation of poets in Canada writing in Icelandic, by far the most important is Stephan G. Stephansson. He is more, however, than merely the best of a small group. He ranks as perhaps one of the most powerful poets to write in Icelandic during the last 100 years and his importance transcends any division into groups that I may make. I will discuss him in more detail a little later.

The original group of Icelandic settlers seems to have been composed largely of poets and writers, and it is difficult to choose representatives from among them. Worth mentioning in this group are Kristina Stefansson, Jon Runolfsson, Jonas Ari Sigurdsson, Johann Magnus Bjarnason and Magnus Markussón. As well, two brothers, Gisli and Einar Johnsson, published significant work and a father and daughter, Sigurbjorn Johannson and his daughter Jakobina both wrote verse in Icelandic. Jakobina, though born in Iceland, grew up in Canada and so belongs more with the group of Canadian-born writers in Icelandic. Her most important work was translating from Icelandic to English. Finally, Thorstein Thorsteinsson, though he arrived in Canada later than previously mentioned poets, belongs essentially with that group.

It is impossible within the scope of this paper to deal separately with all these poets. Their work, however, is characterized by a number of similarities. All were intensely aware of the Icelandic tradition out of which they wrote and they attempted to carry it on in their own verse.

Their separation from the homeland led them to write poems of nostalgic remembrance and lyric tributes, both to the old country from which they had come and to the new country that had welcomed them. Their poetry is the poetry of nature and of religion. It celebrates the seasons, and examines broad and universal human emotions. It does not, however, deal very often with the explicit detail of their pioneering experience. Perhaps the best example of the group is Thorstein Thorsteinsson, or Þ Þ Þ, as he signed his poems. Thorsteinsson was born in Iceland in 1879 and came to Canada at the age of twenty-two. He spent the rest of his life in Canada, but he always considered himself an Icelander. He spoke English well, but refused to speak it except when it was unavoidable. He wrote exclusively in Icelandic and, when he died, his ashes were returned to Iceland. His poetry is marked by a keen consciousness of the traditions of Icelandic poetry and much of his work evokes a landscape quite different from the Canadian landscape in which he lived. Even when he wrote about Canada, as he did on occasion, the framework out of which he saw the land and the imagery and language with which he handled his Canadian experience, was thoroughly Icelandic.

His poetry is interesting, often exciting, but it belongs to Icelandic literature rather than to Canadian. Poems like "Heidor Eru Heimar" (Heaven is our home) are almost untranslatable. The complex alliterative and stress pattern of the poem and its formal shape have a counterpart in Anglo-Saxon poetry, but not in modern English poetry. Classical Icelandic reference makes it obscure to those not aware of Icelandic literary tradition. A reference to "ljósir ljúflingar" might be translated as "the fairest of fairies" but in English that sounds awkward. English literature has no equivalent to the hierarchy of the little people in traditional Icelandic writing. In a poem like "The Song of the Sea," much of the language has no equivalent in English. Icelandic, with its concern for the sea, has a much richer vocabulary to describe the sea, and so several fuzzy English words must often be used where a single Icelandic one will do and this, of course, wrecks the translation. Even when, in poems like "Quebec," he is concerned with a Canadian landscape, he deals with it from the point of view of an outsider. Other poems, such as Sigurbjorn Johannson's "Emigration to Canada," catch the essence of that sense of being outside.

*I never knew what Dearth's grim hand
To starving mortals meant
Until from out my native land
It gave me banishment.*

*With half my life-time thrown away,
In exile I must toil,
And rest, when ends my human day,
In this cold, alien soil.*

The next generation, the generation of native-born Canadians writing in Icelandic, is predictably a smaller group. Kirkconnell, in his *Canadian Overtones*, published in 1935, lists Pall Gudmundsson, P. S. Pálsson, Nanna Anderson, S. E. Bjornson, B. J. Hornfjord, S. B. Gunnlaugsson, Magnus Johannesson, J. H. Hunfjord, Paul Bjarnason and Guttormur J. Guttormusson. Of these, the most significant is Guttormur Guttormusson. He is a transitional figure whose work draws on the best elements of the Icelandic tradition, and uses it to deal with what is an essentially Canadian experience. He is a poet of great range and power and he deals with the experience of living in the country and encountering its landscape and its society. It is important to Canadians that his work be translated and that it be translated well. Attempts have been made: his most famous poem, "Sandy Bar," is available in four different translations. Good as these translations are, none give the English reader more than an inkling of the depth and power of the original. And it is important that the student of literature in this country understands the imaginative forces that have shaped that literature. One of the imaginative forces, the deep and often tragic experience of the pioneer, is nowhere captured with the force and vitality of Guttormusson's "Sandy Bar." It will have to be translated again, for it is a poem that can generate such power out of Canadian landscape and a Canadian experience that should not be lost. Guttormusson's range of subject and his range of tone are vast, from the magic power of "Sandy Bar" to the comic delight of such a poem as "These Bones Were Wages," in which a lost traveller cuts off the tail of his faithful dog to keep himself from starvation, then in gratitude, throws the dog the bone to chew on. At his best, Guttormusson moulds together abstract and universal experience with the common details of everyday life. A poem like "The Keeping of Bees," fuses together a man's tragic assessment of a defeated life with the ordinary experience of keeping bees. In a poem like "A Dream," a romantic and abstract vision of inspiration is tied firmly to the earth when the poet captures Pegasus the horse of inspiration and ties him in a cow shed on his farm.

Intelligence and humour are the hallmarks of Guttormusson's verse. His contribution to Canadian literature is real. And here is an important point about translation. Any work must continually be retranslated. The work

that speaks to one generation will not speak to another. Pope's *Homer* does not relate to the twentieth century. The point is that the original remains unchanged, but the culture that responds to the translation changes and must be spoken to in its own language. There will *never* be a final and correct translation of "Sandy Bar." But there will, and there should be many attempts.

The third generation of Icelandic writers, by which I mean the writers of Icelandic descent writing in English, is even smaller. Since they entered the mainstream of Canadian writing, and their work appears in widely scattered places, they are also a good deal more difficult to identify. Laura Goodman Salverson, of course, is an important member of this group. Her novel, *The Viking Heart*, was received with a great deal of critical approval when it first appeared in 1926. She was awarded the Governor General's medal for fiction in 1937 for her novel *The Dark Weaver*, and the Governor General's award for non-fiction in 1939 for her autobiography, *Confessions of an Immigrant's Daughter*. Salverson entered the mainstream of English Canadian writing and she was, and still is, recognized as an important figure in the tradition of Canadian writers. Interestingly, the portion of her work that is best remembered, and is still studied in courses on Canadian literature, is that portion which deals intensively and lovingly with her Icelandic background.

Of the younger writers, the best known is W. D. Valgardson, who has published three collections of short stories, *Blood Flowers*, *God is Not a Fish Inspector* and *Red Dust*, as well as a collection of poetry, *In the Gutting Shed*. These have received universally good reviews from critics across the country. Valgardson's work is tight, realistic, powerful and suspenseful. The best of it deals with the experience of that generation of Icelandic Canadians who are not settlers, but who had taken this country for their own. It goes beyond that to examine as well the experience of the Ukrainian and other settlers of Manitoba's inter-lake country, and to look at the small victories and defeats of a new and homogenized generation trying to find its way through the bewildering variety of modern Canadian cultures.

Kristjana Gunnars is another, though somewhat different case. She grew up in Iceland, but came to Canada in her teens. Only recently has she begun to write poetry in English. She has been so successful that three collections of her work will come out in the next year. Her long series, *Settlement Poems* (Turnstone Press, 1980), is a beautiful examination of the original Icelandic settlement in Canada. "Johann Briem IV" is an example:

the finest wizard of the north

*saemundur fródi says
there are other ways
to escape a sense of evil
on a wicked journey*

*by steamship north
on red river august 5
two large flatboards like eyes
one tied on each side
of the steamer, looking east
looking west, arriving*

*in winnipeg tuesday august 8
six o clock at night*

*where a human brain is buried
in thought of winter
& memory is three months long
towards the north*

*to flee the man
who doesn't want you, don't
recite the our
father forwards & backwards*

*saemundur fródi says
there are other ways
soak a stolen brass
in your own blood*

*pull an aye
pull a man's head
out of your own blood
steal an imp
of a man's rib
from a grave at whitsun*

*galdra-leifi, another wizard
watered a man's head
with wine & bread
& with it he read the future*

*what they'll pull from your blood
once you're dead
but death isn't necessary
saemundur fróði says
there are other ways
to journey the north*

I want now to turn back to Stephan G. Stephansson. I have not included him in my survey to this point because it seems to me that he transcends any attempt to fit his work into any neat compartment. Stephansson was born in Iceland in 1853 and came to North America in 1873. After a brief stay in the United States he settled in southern Alberta where he spent the rest of his life. He published an enormous quantity of work over a long and fruitful lifetime and he is recognized in Iceland as a major poet. It is not, however, his contribution to Icelandic literature that is important here, but his contribution to Canadian literature. It is a contribution that has not been given its proper due. Stephansson, though not formally educated, was a very learned man, and a man in close touch with currents of thought in the world in general. He studied the Icelandic tradition carefully and though I am no expert on the literature of Iceland, I have been told that his mastery of the old forms, combined with his visions of a new world, helped to revitalize poetic language in Iceland.

Stephansson's contributions to Canadian literature are two. First, like Guttormusson, he dealt in an intense way with Canadian phenomena and Canadian experience; he captures it in a way that can break through even the most inadequate of translations. Second, he was the first poet in Canada, writing in any language, who wrote out of a modern sensibility. During the First World War, Stephansson wrote a series of war poems that are startling in the nature of their sentiments, power of expression and in the quality of ideas. They are also unparalleled in Canadian writing. At a time when other poets writing in Canada were still writing about how sweet and befitting it was to die in battle, what a grand and glorious thing war was, Stephansson wrote his poem "Armistice," a long poem that is violently and bitterly against war. While other poets were applauding the social order and insisting that this was the best of all possible worlds, Stephansson produced a biting and effective attack on social injustice and its resultant human misery. Poems of that sort were beginning to be written elsewhere: Wilfred Owen, Siegfried Sassoon and a handful of others around the world were struggling with the spirit of a new age. Here is my

own translation of the opening lines of "Armistice."

*Then came a lull in the battle.
The shooting had stopped.
Across the field they lay scattered,
the dying and dead,
their bodies a bar to the battle,
a carrion wall. Hawks' meat.
The seething of maggots was a bulwark between them
a quicksand of carnage,
a rot of green meat
that was up to the knees and the life that was in it
was worms.*

*Then a few hours truce
while they bulldozed the bodies
so the battle could start
on a clean road to hell
while each pawn on his square
was motionless, poised
for the manslaughter-chess
to be played on that bloodfield
you could whisper across.*

"Armistice" is a powerful and almost repellent picture of the horrors of war. In Canada, it would be at least fifteen years before that spirit would be expressed in English. It is commonly believed that Canada is outside that movement, that others had to express these feelings first before we were able to deal with them. Stephansson, however, is proof that this was not the case, and it is important that his work be available in English translation.

Stephansson wrote as well a number of poems about Alberta, in which he depicts the landscape and people of his new home. "Toast to Alberta" is a brilliant description of landscape that at the same time demonstrates his political position. The translation has recently been completed by Kristjana Gunnars, of whom I spoke earlier, and it captures more clearly than any other translation of his work the intricate rhythms of Icelandic poetry.

*Young nurse
with mountain arms,
in winter's hoar frost
morning,
you warm your breast
of river, plain, crag,
and slope of spruce.*

*A weather-beaten
refugee,
I find calm
in your green valley
hands
of meadow lake, knoll, pass,
shelterbelt and hollow.*

*On a pale spring
night, northern lights
hover in the high
corner
of a glacier
and a red wild rose
is covered with rime
this morning.*

*When thick clouds
of winter crowd
over me,
you flush with spring
and your thaw
smile mellows
my winter cramps.*

*Young nurse, wake
for an exiled
rock dove
but lock your embrace
with glacier steel
against the trenchboots
of a capitalist
or the firebrand
of a fanatic.*

I would like to read you another of Stephansson's poems, "Pioneer Woman,"¹ along with Gunnar's notes. These notes indicate the context of the poem and they illustrate the difficulties of translation.

(Margrét Jónsdóttir from Tindastóll, Alberta)

I

*September night in Alberta,
rime settles
on cracked awnings,
glazed windows.
Every June grass*
in the sod or shurb
is dead- or near death.*

*Dust mirages turn†
in stormcloud rags
over the raw prairie.
Winds ramble**
through barrens and shelterbelts
to the dirge of dry
reed grasses.††*

*No dusk flush
stays on the peaks.
Noon shadows press
night into the plain.
Tonight stiff fingers****

*The word is "fardager," which are in June, but also the days people move.

†The word is "hilla upp," which indicates swarms of reflections over a plot of land, reflecting distant places.

**The word is "attavillt," which means having lost all sense of direction as well.

††The word is "líkfyldg laufa," which means the funeral procession of autumn leaves.

***Stiff in the sense of being awkward, as he sits down to write about something better than himself.

*pluck a silent string:
tonight I wake
with a hawk's corpse.**

1904

(Translated by Kristjana Gunnars)

Stephansson transcended the limitations of culture, and his work is both Icelandic and Canadian.

Finally, then, we are left with a problem of language. Some of the Icelandic poetry written in Canada should *not* be translated. It is essentially Icelandic poetry and its soul will be lost in that translation. But some poetry like the poetry of Stephan G. Stephansson and Guttormur Guttormusson must be translated, not because it is important that English speaking people see the glories of Icelandic literature, but because it is important that Canadians understand their own experience. One vital part of that experience, because it is contained by the Icelandic language, is inaccessible to them.

Let me end by reading you a poem by Einar Pall Jonsson, called "The Laundress."

*She worked as a housemaid, then as a laundress
in small town Winnipeg, full of emigres speaking
every language except our own: she was Icelandic
and as she worked she sang the old Icelandic hymns
and songs: the songs had all her joy, they brought
all her peace. She kept reaching for the language
that got lost in her life. She could never speak it
again, though it always measured her breath.*

*Late one summer, as she lay dying, she sang again
the Icelandic hymns, sang in her mother tongue,
an other tongue for us; and as we lay her
in a foreign grave, we, who know no Icelandic,
who know then almost nothing of what she loved
and lived by, say our prayers over her in English.*

If Canadians are going to gain a distinctive identity, to learn to speak in a

*The word is "valur," which is a hawk, but also the dead field of battle.

language that will, as Jonsson puts it, measure their breath, they are going to have to confront all the aspects of their experience. Ethnic literature is an important aspect of that experience.

Notes

1. "Pioneer Woman" is one of Stephansson's "elegy-poems" for a fellow pioneer. It commemorates the death of Margrét Jónsdóttir of Tindastoll, later Markerville, Alberta. There are four sections and sixteen stanzas, and the first section is translated here. It acts as an "overture" to the whole piece.

Four things are being mourned in the whole poem: 1) Margrét Jónsdóttir; 2) the dissolution of the settlement (or ethnic strength in Canada); 3) the lack of direction in Canada; and 4) the lack of appreciation for women's work.

The poem traces the development of a nation, from barrens to populated farmlands, and from different ethnic groups to one nation. The first generation of settlers is dying and the future is uncertain. ("The pioneer trains thin out and the graveyard is half full.") Margrét was part of that generation. Her homestead had the qualities necessary for a strong nation, and he asks the future whether a life spent raising and creating what we have now could be considered wasted. But he knows, he says, she'll be forgotten, because people measure human worth in newspaper paragraphs, and the judges are rumour and gossip. And people find it useless to "listen to someone walking about on an autumn night, mumbling poems at obscure gravesites." "But it's this woman who aided you when the heroes of history slept."

The description of autumn dusk in the first section is also a description of the end of pioneering and the death of Canada's creative force, and a vision of a cold future, without purpose.

“Ethnicity and Identity: The Question of One’s Literary Passport”

Panel: Pier Giorgio di Cicco, Maria Campbell,
Andrew Suknaski, Rudy Wiebe

Chairperson

The topic of this panel discussion is general enough to allow just about anything to be said. But one of the questions that arises, partly out of the things that you normally put on a passport and partly out of Dr. Kreisel’s paper last night, is the question of language. All four of the writers on the panel publish in English, yet for each there is another language—Italian, German, Cree and Ukrainian—somewhere in the background of their consciousness and upbringing. I would like first of all to ask each panelist to explain his/her relationship to that other language. Do you feel it as an influence? Is it a conscious problem for you whether or not to write in that language? If you don’t write in it, how does the awareness of it continue to influence your writing in English? Giorgio, would you like to start.

Pier Giorgio di Cicco

When I’m at home, I am the only one in my family that doesn’t speak broken English. I don’t write in Italian because it doesn’t come as fluently. I was brought to Canada at three years of age to an English-speaking

continent and English became, in a sense, more of a mother tongue. It's more fluent for me; it's more intimate. It became a more viable means of expression. I've tried now and again in the last six or seven years to write in Italian and have been dissatisfied because it takes a good deal of work and effort. Apart from that, I really would not get that much enjoyment out of it, and there really is not that much support or encouragement for it in the Italian community in Toronto or in Canada. I'm aware, of course, of the Italian language and have been aware for years that as a writer I hear it in one sense or another: tonalities, words, connotations, denotations, the resonances are always there and I do believe that they find their way into the kind of English literature that I write.

Rudy Wiebe

I'm a bit of an oddball up here, I think. For one thing, I am the oldest, I'm sure. But more important is that being a Mennonite isn't an ethnic designation. It's not racial at all; it's more like being a Quaker or a Mormon. Being a Mennonite is being part of a religious group which in certain ways acquires some of the characteristics of an ethnic group. For example, the Mennonites, in their several hundred years of life in Russia where my parents came from (I'm not a third-generation Canadian as Henry Kreisel seemed to indicate last night. My parents had been here only four years when I was born. I'm second generation; my father was forty-two when he arrived here.), did become a group unto themselves, but the point is that Mennonites are not a *racial* group in the sense that Ukrainians or Italians can be defined racially. There were, for example, Mennonites in Canada long before the arrival of the Russian Mennonites, whose language I don't understand because their dialect is quite different from mine. The other fact is that I grew up in a home where we spoke two languages, both Germanic but very distinctly different, one Frisian in origin and the other High German. My native language isn't really High German but rather a Low German dialect. I spoke it with my parents always, throughout my lifetime, and if I think in any language other than English I think in Low German not High German. I didn't speak English until I went to school, but I don't remember learning it (some people wonder whether I ever have). But the point I would make here is that language is less important to me since the ethnicity thing is really missing, is less important than perhaps the concept of the group which permeates my thinking. My people had basically a religious orientation rather than a linguistic one. Mennonites have a history of adopting any language that is convenient for them to use. In South America now they all speak Spanish or Portuguese quite easily. The essence of the Mennonite group is not tied

so much to language, although language is often convenient for separation from other groups, but rather to the ideas that they hold. For me, the ideas, concepts and religious outlook are more important than the language of my people.

Maria Campbell

Rudy says he's the oldest member here. I'm probably the second oldest but I'm the youngest racially. Trudeau declared eight years ago that we were a people, and our racial origins were recognized as such. I started speaking English when I started school. Cree is still my first language and since I started writing, I've had a lot of trouble trying to write in English. It is only in the last fourteen or fifteen years that my written English has become reasonably good. When I'm writing I find that my thoughts are in Cree first, and then I have to translate them. When I'm writing I really have a difficult time because I find that, at least for me, English either does not have enough words or there are too many words that are really meaningless. If I were able to write in Cree, I would only need one word to describe what I'm saying. I really get upset because I have all these words on paper and I don't need all of them. I don't know what to do with them and so I try to sort them out, so much so in fact that sometimes I am way behind. There is this joke that Maria Campbell is always in trouble with deadlines, and this is one of the real problems that I face in translation. The other is that I can't put the feeling across in English. I have a great deal of difficulty with that. The passion or whatever it is that I feel is there in Cree and it's really poetic for me, but I have difficulty conveying it in English.

Andrew Suknaski [to Rudy Wiebe]

Your father arrived in this land when he was forty-two?

Rudy Wiebe

It wasn't my fault.

Andrew Suknaski

That's an interesting date because my mother was also forty-two when she arrived here. My first years were spent conversing in Polish and Ukrainian. We spoke Ukrainian in our household. And the Ukrainian I learnt often had Polish words in it. It was only at the age of six that I started to learn English, which was also a common experience for many native people and those from other ethnic groups. I was learning the North American culture, although I had learnt something of that through Catholicism, if

one can call that culture. But like Maria, it was difficult for me to learn English. In fact, I failed grade one because it took me two weeks simply to learn the word "I."

Rudy Wiebe

What were you using?

Andrew Suknaski

"Ia" is the word in Ukrainian. I am trying to emphasize that it has always been a struggle for me to actually write a sentence. Writing poetry is an evasion of trying to construct one proper English sentence with punctuation [Laughter]. That's why I write without capitals or commas. The best model for me to use is Joyce's idea of the stream of consciousness. All the lines run into one another, thus I turned my adversity into an advantage.

Looking at this theme, I'm fascinated by the word "passport" because I recently read the passage in the selected writings of Dovzhenko that states: "Nobody wanted to study in the History Department The professors were arrested almost every year, and the students knew what history is: a passport to death." But what sort of history are we talking about here? We're talking about traditional history of the old order of the first and second generation people that have been reading papers to us. I want to reclaim some of the things that those people adhere to, but also I want to live in the present. And this is a very difficult process. David Arnason, who gave us a brilliant paper on Icelandic culture around Gimli [Manitoba], claims that he doesn't believe in history. Actually, I don't believe in traditional history, the history as reported in the early papers. I believe in the artist's history, the poet's history that deals with myth and ritual, a history that is transformed through the poet's imagination to his own habitation, time, place and culture. This is not quite the kind of history that's taught at the University of Alberta. We're dealing with the creative act, the subconscious and the imagination. I want to relate this kind of history to my time and my generation.

In *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, Ursula Iguaran's husband comments that "A person does not belong to a place until there is someone dead under the ground." How do we respond to that? Maria's people, the Cree, believe that they touched the earth, with the clear implication that the people arriving here don't yet have an earth to bury themselves in.

Maria Campbell

I would like to clarify one thing—I'm not Cree, I'm half Cree. I have problems within my own native community. Being a native writer has its

difficulties. Our stories have always been oral ones and I'm a half-breed and because of that a great deal is expected of me by my own people and by the Indian people as well. But it's really difficult because when I translate or tell an Indian story, the community that encouraged me to do that is also the community that gives me the most criticism. On the other hand, in the non-native community there's criticism too, because my history is already written by "Canadians" and what I'm saying is what I have been hearing, which means that maybe what I'm saying is not necessarily true because historians have already said how it should be treated. So, for native writers it's really difficult, and it has only been in the last few years that anybody's published us. For the first time we're writing things down and we have all kinds of pressures placed upon us. The native community, too, wants us to write down almost everything and it makes us feel (at least I feel that way) that we don't have very much time. You come away feeling that a writer cannot write something down quickly enough, regardless of its importance. Because of the other things happening to us—some of us being status, some of us being non-status and some of us being mixed bloods—also makes it really difficult at times. I feel that this is my passport. I grew up as a Catholic and thought I was baptized a Catholic. I found out later that I was baptized Lutheran; my father just informed me. But I have always felt that the kind of things that my grandmother and great-grandmother taught me were part of my tradition. But I've also been reminded that while I am comfortable with it, there are native writers who have serious problems with it.

Pier Giorgio di Cicco

I share that experience of not belonging to either one, receiving criticism from one or the other while departing from those directions that interfere with my development. But to refer to your comment about the effort to create in whichever country is physically a home (a matter of belonging here or getting to belong more than one did in the past and certainly more than one's ancestors did), I think that was a real problem, a conscious problem for me for a number of years in working through the ethnic crisis. The crisis was superseded by the effort to belong to at least three countries in which I've lived and to which I owe psychic allegiance. I lived in the United States for ten years and have been in Canada for over fifteen years and have a strong backlog of memories and mythos from being Italian. So the effort seems to me to belong somehow to all three. It would be simpler if I could belong to just one of these three countries. I have a lot of difficulty empathizing with landscapes and certainly with regionalism in Canada. I have lived in Toronto which is (as David Arnason was trying to

tell me last night) a region; it is certainly an amorphous region. I don't think that one can get one's bearings or feel rooted in a town like Toronto. Toronto's a peculiar town and a haven for immigrants and expatriates, with writers like George Jonas and George Faludy and Ludwig Zellar, and it's a good place to be. It's a good place to sort out all these problems. It's a land of opportunity, but those who come do not feel especially rooted there and they do not need to come to grips with their problems; they're internationalists. I, in fact, returned to Toronto because when we emigrated from Italy, my early childhood was in Montreal and Toronto. We moved to the United States where I grew up from the age of eight to eighteen. An environment like the United States, which insisted on the melting pot, was absolutely intolerant of someone trying to sort out these kinds of ethnic crises and trying to come of age in the sense that Professor Kreisel referred to last night. I can remember coming to Toronto with a sense that here was a place where great nationalism and intolerance were not rampant and I could come and sort things out; the Canadian environment, I remember thinking, was one where I could sort out these problems, where I could try to find out what it was to be myself and what I might become. It was a very conscious kind of effort.

Rudy Wiebe

And you discovered that without some relationship to a larger group; you discovered that only within yourself? Is that the point?

Pier Giorgio di Cicco

Yes, among English-speaking people.

Rudy Wiebe

Yes, but it has no great reference to other people.

Pier Giorgio di Cicco

No, especially not to the Italian community. In fact, one of the problems with the Italian community is something I touched on before—the problem of dialects and different places even from within the mother country. Most of the one million Italians that are in Canada emigrated from the south of Italy. Fortunately or unfortunately, my parents are from the area around Florence. There are language barriers and dialect problems between north and south. It wasn't as if I was welcomed with open arms into the Italian community in Toronto and became one of them and spoke their dialect. No, I was still relegated to play the outsider. But still, Toronto was an environment where I could work on the experience, and the surrounding

culture didn't try to make me conform to it, which was, in fact, what I had experienced growing up in the United States. I found it a veritable blessing in my formative years to have come to Canada, to be in Canada, as opposed to the United States, as an immigrant, as a European.

I think in both English and Italian, but the apparatus for writing is such that when ideas of a particular sort enter my mind, there's an automatic apparatus that leads it into English. There's an apparatus for me as a writer that says it's time to turn off, that says it will not go in the Italian vein; it must go in the other direction. But the Italian language is there, consciously and subconsciously.

Rudy Wiebe

I never think of writing a poem. The silliest thing I could imagine is trying to write a novel in German. Perhaps the emotional equivalent would be to tell you about when my wife and I were married. She's from Canada, too, but she also speaks German. We were married in Germany and one of the interesting experiments we tried was speaking lovers' language to each other in German. We'd never get past the first three or four words before we would burst out laughing. There is a perfectly fine emotional language in German but it didn't work for us; it was so totally artificial, we just broke up. Now perhaps that is the equivalent of the emotion of writing from somewhere in there, but it just doesn't work. I don't know, maybe Robert Kroetsch knows how this works. Are these things equivalent? Writing a poem and speaking lovers' language, are they the same?

Robert Kroetsch

Just about the same thing.

Rudy Wiebe

Maybe that's the trouble I was getting into all the time, the differences then.

Another participant

There would be a difference if you made love to a woman who speaks only German.

Rudy Wiebe

Well, I wondered about that. [Laughter] I think I might owe myself that experience.

Participant

That would be different.

Rudy Wiebe

Yes, it would.

Maria Campbell

Well, we don't have a written language, so I couldn't write it in Cree.

Rudy Wiebe

What do you mean? Cree has been written since 1841 when Reverend Evans, the Methodist missionary, invented an alphabet for you.

Maria Campbell

But those are syllabics and if you could speak Cree you could read that.

Rudy Wiebe

Well, I don't know, presumably there's a language that's written down. But what's the matter with syllabics?

Maria Campbell

The people who put it together couldn't speak the language fluently, and even if they had learned to speak it, they didn't understand the passion of the language or whatever you call it.

Rudy Wiebe

Yes, but does the inventor of the alphabet have to have the passion of the language?

Maria Campbell

You have to be able to feel it. If I learn to speak the German you speak, and you are Mennonite, just because I speak the language I'm not going to be expressing myself as a Mennonite. So if you learn to speak Cree and you are still a Mennonite, you're not going to understand my meanings, you're not going to be able to put the same kinds of emphases and nuances in your speech.

Rudy Wiebe

You're missing my point a little bit about the invention of the alphabet. It's a fact that an alphabet exists which allows you to put the Cree tongue on paper.

Maria Campbell

But if you're an Ojibway and you look at the Cree tongue you could be saying something terrible in Ojibway because the alphabet is almost the same. Anyway I don't use the syllabics. I don't write them. Only a few older people do.

Robert Kroetsch

At the risk of being impolite I'd like to ask a nasty question. You have all made it clear that it's a very complex experience to write from an ethnic position. It seems to me that it is too easy, that there's such a simple definition of self when you work from an ethnic posture that you run very close to risking a parody of this fossilized culture. I wonder how you feel about that possibility? Andy, say, pretends he is a Ukrainian. Somebody has said that the main culture is changing radically in Ukraine. Stop the clock, we have here a situation where one's ancestors came in 1898 or whatever, and I'm postulating a kind of simple definition of what it means to be Ukrainian. Isn't there a danger in that simplification?

Andrew Suknaski

I'm pleased that you bring this up because I was disturbed by a point Dr. Kreisel made in his address last night about the question of parody and caricature and how we're going to deal with that. I realized that his comments applied to me and took refuge in one of Eli Mandel's sources, Borges [the Argentine poet and critic]. In a recent biography, Emir Monegal points out Borges' profound interest in the myth of the Minoian labyrinth and Minotaur. In the labyrinth a being existed beneath something masking both God and monster, and they double for one another. We don't know which is which. There's a duplicity. When I paraphrase a tough Ukrainian *baba* I've heard back home, she speaks in a dialect. Maybe she becomes a bit monstrous in some way, but I don't feel that I am detracting from her dignity in doing this. I'm being true to the reality and I'm pointing something out, that is, that *baba* demythologizes our long-standing belief that the man is the head of the household in those days. In fact, *baba* was the god and the head of the household.

Myrna Kostash

What do you mean fossilized and stop the clock? That's true of the immigrant generation, but then you keep on living here.

Robert Kroetsch

I was just postulating. That's fine, if that is the answer. I like it, I thought his answer was tremendous; I wanted to applaud after what he said there.

Pier Giorgio di Cicco

I don't understand the question. Do you mean, are we afraid to stereotype?

Andrew Suknaski

Well, you don't like regionalism. You don't write in dialect. That's why you don't understand the question.

Robert Kroetsch

Yes, did you ever read that book by Sears Larkin about the Irish in Ontario? If I were an Irishman I would have been offended by it. Every cliché ever spouted about Irish Canadians was in that book. Isn't it interesting that the three of you have a kind of double sense of another language in your background. That really interested me: Ukrainian and Polish, two versions of German, a sense of the Italian which is not group Italian.

Andrew Suknaski

Let's take an old classical model, *The Nigger of the Narcissus* by Joseph Conrad. The uniqueness of that story lies in those incredible characters speaking those strange dialects. It's a marvellous story, but that's because those characters are so distinct in the language they speak.

Rudy Wiebe

This gets back to what Maria said earlier. I think a writer who is obviously identified with a certain kind of ethnic group and who writes realistically about that ethnic group really gets hammered by that ethnic group because he is in a sense exposing it. In my first novel, *Peace Shall Destroy Many*, I tried to treat the Mennonite Canadians as if they were just ordinary people. Now, people in my community all over Canada said it would have been all right if I had published that book and it had been distributed only among us. But we hear it coming from the CBC! Other people are talking about us! Who have we been trying to fake all these years by saying that we are only fine, hardworking, honest, decent people; that we never had any adultery in our midst; that we never had any avaricious people? They say, yeah, we have them but the other Canadians didn't know it! I got hammered, and I know Maria did too because of the kind of comments that her book received. You get hammered for showing

the spectrum of the human condition which is there in every race and in every human being. But if you try to idealize one certain group or you try to idealize one period, you can't write believably as the human beings experience it. The fact that *Peace Shall Destroy Many* was the first attempt at a realistic novel by the Mennonite community ever written in North America in English is really the experience I experienced in my own life. I think that's what you are trying to say.

Judy Young

Well, to follow your argument and bring it to a logical conclusion, one can't really distinguish between an ethnic literature and another literature. It may be good or bad, interesting or boring, poetry or prose or whatever, but in the end it's just literature and whether you have some particular ethnic background does not make any difference.

Pier Giorgio di Cicco

I'm not interested in ethnic literature in and of itself. I see that the emphasis in this discussion has been on the non-official languages. I am all for encouraging writing in the non-official languages, this is my background and I'm biased. But what I see is that the Italian community in Canada, which is extremely large, and other communities are suffering because of their ghetto-like structures. There isn't any cross-cultural stuff going on, really. *Maclean's* doesn't review the anthologies you speak of, the anthology of Italian Canadian poets. They don't give you that kind of thing. *Il Corriere Canadese* of Toronto, which has the largest circulation outside Italy, doesn't review books in English. There's nothing going on; they don't know about each other. Certainly the Italian community doesn't know.

Rudy Wiebe

This may be partly because the strong Italian community in Canada is relatively young, largely post-World War Two.

Pier Giorgio di Cicco

It was fairly large before World War Two. The Multicultural History Society of Ontario has a lot of literature that was written by it before World War Two. It's just that the community is very satisfied with its own functions. It doesn't care to go out. And this is true of other ethnic minorities.

Rudy Wiebe

The Italian community is concentrated mostly in Toronto, is it not? So it can, in a sense, pretend that the rest of Canada doesn't matter, right? You can live in certain sections of Toronto and pretend that the rest of Canada doesn't really matter very much. That's unfortunate. The fact is that many smaller ethnic groups could never hold that view because they are more scattered, especially settlements on the prairies. So even though they try to maintain an identity, the dominant English culture affects them deeply. It's different in a large urban centre like Toronto, but two Italian families living in a place like Mundare, Alberta, for example, couldn't last long without being affected on a cultural level.

Pier Giorgio di Cicco

There's geographical landscape that provides obstacles and hardships that are hard to deal with and that certainly is considerable. There's also psychological landscape provided by a tremendous urban environment which is equally formidable and equally threatening and disruptive. I look around at other communities, whether they be Japanese, Hungarian or what not, and I see, since multiculturalism began, the tendency toward self-congratulation with little attempt to look outward. This is usually left to organizations such as the Multiculturalism Directorate or the Ontario Arts Council, which is now also translating authors from the non-official to official languages. The effort to bridge the cultures usually comes from outside the community itself. I find that certainly in the Italian community. I think that as an Italian writing in English, I want to encourage the second generation to write in English about their experiences as Italo-Canadians, to escape the stereotype which, if it comes from anywhere, comes from outside. But the ethnic minorities have stereotypes about the outsiders too.

Maria Campbell

But I don't think that anyone questions that we should continue or try writing in our own language. I feel that ethnic writing is really important. It has been very important to me and it is important to my people, the majority of whom are semi-literate with grade five or grade seven at most. But to analyze our own political situation, we need to understand that there were other good people that were equally oppressed. Perhaps not in the same way but by the same system. I couldn't understand my own history, even after hearing stories and reading the history that was written until I was able to find and to read what was happening in the Ukrainian community and in the Mennonite community: why the people came here;

what happened to them when they came here. Then I started moving out of my own little circle and looking at the whole area. I started really thinking and not closing myself in, walking around thinking that I'm the only one.

Pier Giorgio di Cicco

It's important to know that there are other communities in the same situation, that the same things are happening there; it's important to be aware of other communities. My point is that other communities are not that aware of each other and there are insufficient publications and cultural activities that explain us to other communities in a language other than that of the community itself. I certainly think it's important that the first generation maintains its traditions, linguistic and otherwise. But those who can should be encouraged to express themselves in the language (in the official languages), while retaining a strong consciousness of where they came from.

Maria Campbell

I believe that it should be written in English. I'm not saying that it should be written in Cree. I'm saying that I have difficulty in the translation. But I feel that it's really important to get the translation regardless of the frustration I may suffer, because it's important for me that Myrna Kostash understands the kind of things that happened in my community with my people, just as it's important for me to understand what happened in her community.

Pier Giorgio di Cicco

But you express that to Myrna in English?

Maria Campbell

Yes, that's why it's important for me to write in English.

Pier Giorgio di Cicco

I think we're in agreement.

Myrna Kostash

You talk a lot about the linguistic component of ethnic writing. I was interested, Maria, that you also talked about being part of ethnic literature although you called yourself a native writer.

Maria Campbell

I don't think of myself as an ethnic. You know, I really have trouble with that.

Myrna Kostash

Yes, I know, it's a political question. My question is really about the more formal elements in your writing. Can you identify any of them as being ethnic?

Pier Giorgio di Cicco

When you touch on the formal qualities of a language, you touch on something that's always neglected in discussions about ethnic writing. My justification as a writer, a large justification, is what I bring to the language in which I have chosen to write. What linguistic baggage do I bring with me? What is it about the Italian language that makes my language in English unique? Is there any give and take there? Any linguistic consideration?

Myrna Kostash

Then you are predisposed to certain kinds of form, certain kinds of voice, tone, colour?

Pier Giorgio di Cicco

Many things, voice and tone and metaphor and the sonic values of language. I haven't explored this at length, though I have been very aware of it, and originally this was my intention in compiling an anthology of Italian Canadian poets. But that to me is more important now as a writer. What do I bring? What do I contribute to the English language? Since I've chosen the language of T. S. Eliot and Wallace Stevens and Ezra Pound, what do I bring to that tradition of poetry? That's what we should be talking about, and most criticism avoids that.

Rudy Wiebe

Well, I always get hammered. Somebody comes up with, "This guy doesn't know how to write in English, because, well, you know he admitted once that he did not speak English before he was six years old."

Participant

There is no need to turn that into a cliché. Other people admired your sense of prose and it goes back to what Mr. di Cicco is saying.

Rudy Wiebe

Well, I always hope that's the way it will be seen, but reviewers keep writing the same reviews. *The Blue Mountains of China* is a deliberate experiment of somehow getting certain kinds of Germanic rhythms across, and the reviewer in the *Toronto Globe and Mail* went at me for it. At the same time, she was reading *The Joys of Yiddish* and loving it!

Pier Giorgio di Cicco

That points out a lack of understanding. But what about the criticism that positively acknowledges your relationship to your linguistic background? Negative criticism is always easy to come by. I'm talking about the reviewers who make allowances for the fact ...

Rudy Wiebe

That I can't speak English so well? [Laughter] The point is that most reviewers often don't really credit the kinds of things that perhaps you're trying to do with your language. And perhaps you're not succeeding very well, but at least you're making a certain kind of effort. Everyone accepted certain kinds of linguistic experiments with the English language. For example, the incredible literature of the American Jewish people has established itself linguistically on the prose of North American writing and thinking. We're willing to accept that fact, but we're not willing to accept, say, a Canadian Ukrainian or Italian kind of attempt to expand that. English is the most marvellous language in the world for accepting all kinds of things and the range of what it will allow to be done to it is incredible. Our readers are not willing to accept that yet because, well, you know, who are we? We're just people out on the Canadian prairies, trying stuff; but, after all, *they* live in New York and *they* live in London and that's ultimately different, right? Well, it's not, it's not different at all. We're writers, they're writers ... But the point is they know more about it. Baloney!

Participant

My question was actually going to touch that. I'd like to ask all four of you whether you feel that you have something to contribute to the enrichment of the English language or the Canadian culture in general. And whether you felt that what you were bringing was being rejected by the English language or the English culture, not because it was not English, but because it was from a different background. How would you feel about that?

Maria Campbell

My reaction to that would be, "Look, I've got this big bag of beautiful English words and I've put them together. I've got something to offer and damn it you're going to listen to me."

Participant

Don't you think that it's actually this diversity that will eventually form the Canadian culture and enrich it, if we're prepared to accept it?

Rudy Wiebe

Oh, but I think the kind of thing that I would be looking for in Maria's work, for example, when she writes more imaginatively than say she is allowed to, in a work that's basically biography, is that these verbal gifts should really come out, the kinds of marvellous things, the imagery, the way of seeing that is there in Cree, right, that particular imagistic way of looking, of speaking parabolically, of speaking in images. That is what I personally would like to see more of in her imaginative work. The kind of thing I would really expect to see when you're working on a novel. I would like to hear more of that Cree voice. The English language can handle it. English is a marvellous language; it can accept almost anything.

Maria Campbell

For myself, I don't think it matters what the reviewers say, as long as the people who read your work like it.

Participant

To me, it seems that a lot of discussions seem to reduce ethnicity to linguistics. To refer to something that Maria said at the very beginning, it's the concept that counts rather than the language. I think Maria is saying that I'm going to listen because my concept is different. People are not going to reject Maria's book just because it has Cree elements. They're going to reject it for what she says: about the situation, about the concept, about the identity, about your entire background, about your view of existence.

Pier Giorgio di Cicco

Existence is not linguistic; it's partisan, cultural, psychological. It's not linguistic. If that's what you're saying, I agree. My poetry receives adverse criticism in Canada because it draws from South American poetry and thus the poetic line is expansive. It's because I reflect influences outside the Canadian context. This is another topic we haven't talked about. I'm

more interested in the writer. A true writer is not interested in being an Italo- or Hungarian Canadian; that is a convenience adopted for discussion. In the final analysis, writing is an individual task related to the collective. It's an individual struggle to transcend ethnic or national boundaries. One is compelled to represent and discuss the communal issues, when in fact the struggle is individualistic.

Participant

It seems to me that not only is the English language very receptive to your work, but also that Canadians themselves are very receptive to the sort of things that you're doing. I think that the ethnic category is essential to Canadian literature. If you think of ten major Canadian writers, will not six of them be writers from ethnic backgrounds? A possible danger is that some writing in Canada will be accepted and welcomed simply because it's ethnic literature, without regard to its quality. This latter factor is sometimes disregarded in our enthusiasm for the work in question.

Pier Giorgio di Cicco

I disagree. There is no widespread acceptance or appreciation of their work. It's usually a case of a handful of individuals who have powerful influence and who have procured a grudging acknowledgement from the media at large for writers such as George Faludy, Barbara Amiel, John Columbo or Irving Layton. I do not perceive a popular appreciation of writers such as Walter Bauer among people who are interested in Vancouver poetry or Montreal poetry. I don't see that kind of discrimination going back and forth. The unofficial languages are linguistically isolated and their literary contributions limited to their native tongue.

Judy Young

But you and your colleagues don't write in another language, you write in English. I know that Canadian literature is never very popular, but in general weren't those of us who read it aware of the existence of Canadian writers, no matter what our ethnic background?

Pier Giorgio di Cicco

This, too, we owe to the liberalism of multiculturalism, which again I think is pitted theoretically against Canadian nationalism. My poetry doesn't derive a great deal from Canadian poets. There are a handful of Canadian poets that I regard as mentors, but a great deal more comes from South American sources, Italian sources, from French and other languages. In

fact, the nationalism of the last twelve years has insisted that Canadian poets look to other Canadian poets and to them alone. As a result, when a Canadian reviewer looks at my work, he doesn't understand it. Instead of seeing South American expressionism in my work, he accuses me of being verbose or whatever, because Canadian poetry doesn't have a place or description for that kind of expansiveness of language. It's multiculturalism that encourages me to express myself in ways that are not indigenously Canadian. It lets me move toward an internationalism (as, for example, in talking about Hungarians as we're doing here). However, when it comes to being appraised critically, there are difficulties; nationalism is still having its heyday and regionalism, if anything, looks toward its own rather than to foreign models. It's even more insular.

Ruth Fraser

Something Andy said disturbed me a little. When you were talking about not twisting history as it is written now, that really is important because there are writers who write extensively about cultural-ethnic-religious community groups. How much responsibility do they feel to tell it like it is? To use an example: my background is Danish and I had been told stories orally about my family and conceived this image of Danes being terribly liberal. They were never racist, bigoted or prejudiced. Theirs was a true democracy. They were terribly clean, always. Then I went to Denmark and I found out that they are the same as everyone else. It doesn't matter whether you are black or white, but it matters what kind of job you have. Whether you have a store or whether you work for the government is immaterial, but it matters where your house is situated. It matters how long your people have been in the country. The Danes don't have a vergy good written language, but they are fine storytellers and express themselves well orally. And for me, they distorted the reality. How much responsibility do you feel about that?

Andrew Suknaski

Okay, to clarify that. I learned that special sense of history from a professor of American literature at Simon Fraser University when he discussed a writer called Charles Olson. Olson, he said, was the one who told his generation that it had to go back to the root words. To understand history, you must understand the Greek sense of the word—*istorin*, which he defined as going and looking around your special place of interest once you have exhausted the known historical sources. If you want to know about Ulysses, you read what has been written about him, but then you go and talk to the remaining people that are a continuance of that history.

Ultimately, Olson said, the poet becomes the person he is trying to understand, whether it's Jesus Christ, Buddha or Ulysses. That's the only way you can understand what they were at that time. You can't understand them by simply reading about them.

Maria Campbell

When I started writing about my community, I think I was politically very radical. Having decided that I wanted to create political change through literature, I had to sit down and really think about the responsibility I had in writing about my people, my culture, my history. I couldn't let myself get carried away romantically, because it's not my story I'm telling; it's the story of a people. All those who have written about us before have always held the view that either we were really a bad people, hanging around bushes just waiting for someone to come by, or that Indians were romantic, beautiful, noble red men. I had to do something different and it meant that I had to look at my community; if it contained bad elements, I had to be honest about them. If I was going to write about the bad things, I also had to help people understand why the bad things happened. If people are going to say that one of our people's biggest problems is alcoholism, then they have to know why that's a problem and I have to take on that responsibility.

Andrew Suknaski

The point I'm trying to make is that ultimately we write the novel, the biography or a poem and ultimately you have to hear something. You read about Big Bear and you can hear him through Wiebe's words on the page that takes you right there—the way it was. You read about Maria's Cheechum and you hear her through Maria's being. You can taste Cheechum's bitter-sweet tea—that's what I'm interested in.

Participant

To get back to the point of your original quotation, what the artist is trying to do is based on imagination and this is where the duplicity brought up earlier comes in. You're using two terms, two sets of history obviously, so isn't the duplicity in the language itself? If history is the passport to death, surely imagination is the passport to true history and that's what we as artists want to try and do.

Another participant

You have told us what they hear. What do you hear?

Andrew Suknaski

What do I hear? To continue on from what Maria said, I heard a lot of strange things in my community, revealed them and at times was victimized for it, just as Rudy was occasionally put down by his own people. I witnessed things and I wrote about them. Actually, I didn't want them published, but Al Purdy [the editor of *Wood Mountain Poems*] said, "Look, you don't sweep things under the carpet, you have to say those things as they were. You're not going to disguise anything here. In the last section about your father, the epilogue, where you talk about the monster and God in him. No, I won't take that off the poem." I didn't want it included because I felt it would hurt him. You reveal things. You have to be honest with reality, honest with yourself.

Participant

Do you think that poets, artists, writers should serve some purpose, or should they write for the sake of art alone?

Rudy Wiebe

I can answer that. The whole purpose of art, poetry and storytelling is to make us more humane.

Participant

I'd like to go back to the very beginning, to your father as a monster. Doesn't it seem that we're talking of something that we all experience in the process of growing up? Finally, we see our parents, not the way they appeared to us when we were kids, but the way they really are, as human beings.

Rudy Wiebe

Are you talking about an act of rebellion?

Participant

Every ethnic writer that I know claims he had this sort of reawakening or looked at his ethnic roots and saw things which he disliked. Usually he claims that writing helped him grow up and at last he can say: "I can tell the truth, I've examined my background and being a mature being, am no longer afraid to say things about it that I couldn't express earlier."

Pier Giorgio di Cicco

My problem is that having written about my father as an immigrant, having dealt with his personal tragedy, I now find that as I get older, I

become my father, because generically we are in the same family, those problems simply keep coming back. I think that in writing as in life things reappear in new disguises and forms. It's a never-ending process.

Participant

I think that you can get rid of the guilt of being Italian by confronting yourself with it. You write it out, exposing the hypocrisy.

Pier Giorgio di Cicco

I think it's illusory even to talk about eliminating guilt, because a new guilt takes its place. If it doesn't come from being Italian Canadian, it will come from something else. These are personality traits. If you grow up in a certain way, you don't purge yourself of that particular aspect of yourself; it reoccurs in different forms and guises; you don't kill one thing and regrow another.

Rudy Wiebe

How can you be guilty for being an Italian?

Pier Giorgio di Cicco

Good question!

Danylo Struk

Ukrainian Emigré Literature in Canada

In his pamphlet, *Ukrainian Literature in Canada* (Edmonton, 1966), Yar Slavutych provides the reader with the following summary, which offers a rough scheme of periodization of Ukrainian literature in Canada and at the same time reveals some of the major misconceptions prevalent in studies devoted to this literature:

Ukrainian literature in Canada is more than sixty-five years old. Sava Chernetskyj, who came to Winnipeg, Manitoba, in 1899 and stayed there for a year, should be credited as the first Ukrainian author in this country. His poems and a brief story, "Z hlybyny propasty," on a Canadian theme, appeared in *Svoboda* (Scranton, Pa.) in 1899 and in other periodicals later.

The first period of Ukrainian literature was permeated with a folkloristic trend. Teodor Fedyk (1873–1949) and many others wrote about hardships of the first settlers in Canada, expressing their love for the far-away Ukraina.

In the second period, which began with Ivan Danylchuk (1901–1944) and Onufrij Ivakh (1900–1964) around 1930, Ukrainian poetry in Canada was brought to a higher level. Contrary to the previous writings, this is original poetry in the proper sense. Illja Kyrijak (1888–1955) and Oleksander Luhovyj (1904–1962) contributed greatly during World War II with their novels on Ukrainian pioneer settlers in Western Canada.

The third period of Ukrainian literature in Canada commenced with the arrival of political emigrants after World War II. Ulas Samchuk (1905–), a typical realist, who makes his home in Toronto, is the foremost living Ukrainian writer in this country. Mykyta Mandryka (1886–) and Levko Romen (1891–) are also authors of distinction.

Ukrainian literature in Canada is rich and abundant. It can be easily assumed that the number of titles of Ukrainian books, excluding brochures, published here well exceeds one thousand. The great variety of themes and

styles of the works, which appeared here during the last three or four decades, their significant ideas and artistic accomplishments, place Ukrainian literature in Canada on a high level—equal to that in Ukraine.¹

There are several difficulties with the above approach. First, Slavutych, like the other two major contributors to this field of study, Mykyta Mandryka and Peter Krawchuk, fails to define exactly what he means by “Ukrainian literature in Canada.” Does this category include only those works written in the Ukrainian language in Canada or does it also include writings by Ukrainians in English? There seems to be little difference in the eyes of the three critics mentioned. Moreover, they do not differentiate between émigré and non-émigré literature, and appear to be unconcerned as to whether a given author was published in Canada or not. It seems sufficient for a writer to have lived in Canada—if only for a short while—to be considered a Ukrainian Canadian writer.

Second, there seems to be little qualitative consideration given in the analyses provided by scholars like Slavutych. Nor is any serious attempt made to distinguish literature from scholarship, folklore or journalism. It seems that the sole requirement for inclusion in the ranks of “writers” is to have published something, be it only a single poem. Consequently, the major studies of Ukrainian literature to date consist of indiscriminate, chronological listings of writers, scholars and journalists. The result is an inflated history of Ukrainian literature in Canada which concentrates on quantity rather than quality and leads to such questionable statements as Ukrainian literature is “equal to that in Ukraine.”

It is not surprising, given these very loose criteria, that Mandryka, in his *History of Ukrainian Literature in Canada* (Winnipeg, 1968), includes as many as 118 authors. The number is inflated because numerous authors who do not merit discussion are taken into account. One could devote an entire study to a criticism of Mandryka's *History*; suffice it to say, however, that its main virtue is that it lists in chronological order almost everyone who has ever written anything in Ukrainian while living in Canada.²

As for Peter Krawchuk's *Ukrainska literatura v Kanadi* (Ukrainian Literature in Canada), its chief defect is that it is incomplete. Although the author gives the impression that he is discussing the entire body of Ukrainian literature in Canada, he is restricted by ideological considerations to the works of those writers who share his socialist outlook. Nevertheless, he is the only one of the three major scholars of Ukrainian writing in Canada to suggest that there are aesthetic limitations to this body of literature:

If one looks closely at the poems of the Ukrainian worker-farmer poets . . . it is not difficult to notice that their artistic value is not high. (My translation).³

Though quite guarded, this observation nonetheless reveals that the author is aware of the inadequacy of the literature under discussion, which neither Slavutych nor Mandryka seem to recognize.

Although a perusal of the three works mentioned above is indispensable for anyone interested in Ukrainian literature in Canada, the information they contain requires a thorough, critical sifting. For Ukrainian literature in Canada is still very young (despite its seventy-odd years), and like all literature which is torn off from the country of origin, it pales in comparison with the literature of the native land. Could it be otherwise?

To demonstrate what needs to be done, the writer will attempt to create a critical sieve from the parameters designated by the title of this paper: "Ukrainian Emigré Literature in Canada." Taking each item of the title separately, one can sift out those writers who do not qualify. Thus the "Ukrainian" criterion will exclude from discussion those who do not write in Ukrainian. The qualifier "émigré" will eliminate all writers who are Canadian-born and the specification "in Canada" will limit consideration to those who write and publish their works in Canada. This leaves the last and the most important factor, "literature," and it is here that one must begin to disqualify a great many writers.

Using the chronological periodization suggested by Slavutych, one finds that all the writers usually included in the so-called pioneer age of Ukrainian émigré literature in Canada have to be omitted because their works simply do not qualify as "literature." Most of the figures of this period presented what might be described at best as written folklore that is essentially ethnographic in nature and full of nostalgia for the forsaken homeland. The characteristic rhythm is that of a *kolomyika* folk song, with thematic concerns progressing from accounts of the departure from the native land through the hardships of pioneering to a generalized portrayal of life in Canada.

It is only in the second and third periods of Ukrainian literature in Canada (as identified by Slavutych) that writers appear who unquestionably meet all the criteria established in this paper. The first of these is Illia Kiriak (1888–1955), who emigrated to Canada in 1907. His fame rests mainly on his novel, *Syny zemli* (Sons of the Soil), a three-volume family chronicle originally published between 1939 and 1945.⁴ It presents the reminiscences of an old Ukrainian pioneer, Hrehory (Hryhorii) Workun, who relates the experiences of a Ukrainian family

through four decades of life in Canada. The novel gives a realistic depiction of the original homestead, the establishment of the pioneer community, the building of the church, the earliest encounter with a foreign teacher and the first intermarriage.

A sense of Kiriak's style, as well as an indication of his skill in handling a subject as sensitive as mixed marriage, can be obtained from the following excerpts. In the first we see the main characters, Hrehory and Helena Workun, deliberating the offer of marriage that their daughter has received from a non-Ukrainian named Bill Pickle:

It was an endless night for the Workuns and a memorable one, wondering as they did what answer to give Bill.

"The Lord only knows what answer to give Bill," muttered Workun. "Elizaveta caught us in a trap and now we don't know what to do about it."

"I told you to watch the girls; but all you did was to joke about it," Helena reminded him.

"Who would have expected that such an inexperienced youngster could attract a rich Englishman," said Workun in self-defense. "It never occurred to me anything serious would come of it."

"What you thought wasn't worth anything. Why do you suppose he paid us that visit last summer?"

"I thought he was looking over our property and that when he saw how little we possessed, he'd give Elizaveta up as a bad bargain."

"Oh, he's cunning," Helena sniffed. "He won't ask for any dowry now, but after the wedding he'll give you a list of things he thinks are coming to him, and he'll demand every cent of the money she earned and then gave you. Then you'll have something real to think about!"

"The Lord only knows . . ."

"Yes, the Lord only knows! That atheist without father or mother, living alone with his cattle and like his cattle! Misfortune had no other place to cast him but on our doorstep! So he gets out a paper for a wife!"

"Perhaps that's the way things are done in his class."

"What a fine class! Imagine taking out a license for a wife, then tearing it up and saying, 'I don't know you.' Who will be a witness that he was married? What priest married him? Why that would make her just a common-law wife, living in adultery with him. And what of the children. They would be born to eternal shame, without honour and respect among the people."

"You sure have outdone yourself in crowing . . ."

"I'm crowing because my heart bleeds for my daughter."⁵

We are then provided with a description of an encounter between the anxious groom-to-be and the only other Anglo-Celt in the settlement, a

school teacher named Goodwin:

"But tell me sincerely, would you marry Elizaveta if you were in my place?"

"In your circumstances I'd do what you already have a mind to do."

"What would you do in your own circumstances?"

"I'd not get married."

"Why?" asked Bill, looking curiously at Goodwin.

"She wouldn't be accepted in my sphere of life."

"You mean that beyond her primitive surroundings she wouldn't fit?"

"It's as old as the hills, my friend," said Goodwin. "The only reason the French fur-traders married Indian women was that there were no white women around. To them their redskin wives were not companions in our sense of the word, but simply women If those mixed marriages resulted in a negation of racial and religious feelings, suppressed for the sake of peace in the family, both partners in the union will reside in a sort of traditionless no-man's land with nothing to look back or forward to. That is not a healthy atmosphere at any time."

"What you say is not very encouraging. If no happy compromise is possible perhaps I should look for a girl of my own race."

"I had no such thought in mind. Your marriage may turn out very well. The character of the Workun family is reason enough They are a sensible people, kind and considerate of others. I don't think for a moment that Elizaveta would disregard your opinions in the larger affairs of the household, so long as she is free to observe her own religious duties. The house and the children are their domain. They are quite content to leave all the rest to the men."

"That makes me feel better," Bill grinned sheepishly. "To be honest, my mind was made up anyway. If my friends won't accept my wife we shall do without them."⁶

Although a comparison of Kiriak to Tolstoy and Dumas *père* is hardly warranted,⁷ he can be acknowledged as the foremost Ukrainian novelist in Canada. Unfortunately, he is *homo unius libri*, his attempts at short stories and verse falling far short of the talent shown in his epic trilogy.

The second writer meriting consideration within the terms of this paper is Myroslav Irchan (1897–1937), who came to Canada in 1923. A tragic figure with strong pro-communist sympathies, he returned to Soviet Ukraine after six years residence in Canada only to perish in the purges of the thirties. Irchan wrote short stories and plays exposing the exploitation of the working class by the capitalists. He has the distinction of being the first Ukrainian writer in Canada to deal with non-Ukrainian themes. For instance, his short stories, "Vudzhena ryba" (Smoked Fish) and "Smert

Asuara" (The Death of Asuar), are innovative in that they deal with Native Canadian subjects, the former with the Metis and the latter with the Inuit. His writings, however, tend to be tendentious and propagandistic. This, coupled with the fact that Irchan did not remain in Canada for long, relegates him to only a marginal place among Ukrainian émigré writers in Canada.

The first Ukrainian poet of note in Canada was Mykyta Mandryka (1886–1979), one of the literary historians mentioned earlier, who immigrated in 1928. Although he had begun writing as early as 1905, he did not publish his first collection, *Mii sad* (My Orchard), until 1941. In 1958 he published the first of four volumes of his collected poetry under the title *Zolota osin* (The Golden Autumn). This was soon followed by *Radist* (Happiness, 1959) and *Symfoniia vikiv* (Symphony of Centuries, 1961), with volume four, *Sontsetsvit* (Helianthus), appearing in 1965. Some 80 per cent of Mandryka's poems were written in Canada, but not all deal with Canadian themes. Those that do, however, often express praise for the new land:

*My fortunes, Canada, in yours be furled.
With you for ever be my spirit's pact.*

Another paean to the new world is to be found in the conclusion to Mandryka's epic poem "Mandrivnyk" (*The Wanderer*):

*I love you, Humane America,
Bursting with wealth and goodness.
Your cult of life without serfs or masters
Cannot be bought for gold or silver.
I love you, beloved America,
Your cult of freedom, friendship and candour.
If only you—clothed or unclothed—
Could enshrine your girlish beauty.
It is true that you have "snobs" and "matrons,"
And rich men wrapped in furs—
Never mind! They are a curable domestic disease,
And in the millions of your masses, cannot be seen.
Good health to you, rugged New York City,
The Magus of these modern times.
To wanderers like myself, a friend,
And an epilogue to my roaming.*

(*Helianthus*, p. 121. My translation.)

Fortunately, the banality of poems like the one above is offset by works that exhibit the kind of imaginative imagery that is displayed in the lyric, "The New Year":

*They say the New Year is padding on the roofs,
And he—the sly old grandfather—
Has strung his beard up in the grey trees
And is coughing windily in the windows;

In the windmills of the clouds he grinds down snow
In the smithy of frozen rivers he forges frost
With wind-storms he sweeps
The old snow into frozen sheafs.
I tell him: "Old man, go away! Go!"
And he laughs loudly in my ears:
Just wait a little while longer!
I'll drink some spring rain water,
And bask in the warmth of the spring spirit;
Then return fair-haired and youthful!*

(*Helianthus*, p. 4. My translation.)

Most of Mandryka's poems are very neatly structured in cross rhymes, and one rarely encounters a poem which does not contain a sing-song lyrical quality. But one good example of a less lyrical poem is his "Sestry" (Sisters):

*"I deserve revenge, and will get it!"
As if God were speaking . . .
Not true!
That's the beast within the dark corners of our soul,
The poisonous reek from the scum of the crowd.
Anna Karenina is going to the block . . .
She doesn't even have an executioner . . . she walks
unaccompanied,
alone.
And the guillotine—
Like Antoinette—lost in the abyss of thoughts . . .*

They drove Antoinnette on a farm wagon—
 Rejoicing in her humiliation, jeering . . .
 The rabble cried out . . .
 She kept silent.
 Her queenly brow, high above the crowd
 Anna is alone, and approaches the guillotine alone . . .
 Antoinnette is led . . . they put her under the knife,
 the proffered neck of a young swan . . .
 Her Madonna-like figure only flinched
 when the cleaving blade dropped down . . .
 And the head fell off,
 The mob roared, as if at a wedding.
 There is no one with Anna . . .
 Ruffled and tattered,
 she's scattered on the rails
 Anna and Antoinnette—two distant sisters,
 Purer than Margaret,
 Whom the archangels are supposed to take the
heaven . . .
 They repose in dust through the ages,
 Cut to pieces, weak . . .
 Anna . . . Antoinnette . . .

(*Helianthus*, p. 35. Translated by Jars Balan.)

Neither the rather gruesome theme nor the lack of a definite rhyme scheme is typical of Mandryka, but they do reveal his versatility as a poet. In the majority of his poems, however, he adheres to a set rhyme scheme—usually *abab*—and an iambic or anapestic metre, sometimes mixing the two. Many of his poems are love lyrics, full of longing and sadness, the following being a good sample of his work in this genre:

You come to me, and kiss me gently
Embracing me, and cuddling close . . .
Why is the sadness in my heart lingering?
Why is something inconsolable crying out in my soul?

O, I long to lose myself in your embraces,
And drink forgetfulness from your lips;

*May your laughter dissipate my dark grief,
That my heart not fill with tears!*

(Radist, p. 60. Translated by Jars Balan.)

Generally, it may be said that Mandryka's moods are typical of an émigré poet. In addition to the numerous love poems, one finds poems full of nostalgia and patriotism for the homeland; others that are characterized by their search for heroism or by their philosophical dissertations on man; and the usual poetic expressions of gratitude toward and appreciation for the adopted country.

Although Mandryka arrived in Canada during the second period of Ukrainian literary development, he only began publishing at the start of the third period. The post-Second World War era brought a large influx of new immigrants, including a significant number of writers. Many had already established literary careers in Ukraine and most suffered from the shock of the uprooting. But of their number, only four seem to satisfy all the criteria of this paper: Ulas Samchuk (1905–), Yar Slavutych (1918–), Borys Oleksandriv (1921–1979), and Volodymyr Skorupsky (1912–). Omitted from this group is Oleh Zujewskyj (1920–) because both collections of his poetry, "Zoloti vorota" (Golden Gates, 1947) and "Pid znakom Feniksa" (Under the Sign of the Phoenix, 1958), were written and published outside Canada (in Munich). Moreover, as Zujewskyj only emigrated to Canada in the late sixties, his output here has not been large, consisting mainly of poems and a few translations which have appeared in the periodical *Suchasnist*.

Notwithstanding these technically disqualifying factors, Zujewsky is worth mentioning because he is a talented writer and translator who is now a naturalized Canadian citizen. His preference for classical stanzas and a calmness almost devoid of emotionalism, makes him a rather dry, cerebral and characteristically "intellectual" poet. One example, entitled "Ars Poetica," illustrates well the ability of this disciplined neo-classicist.⁸

*Narrow roads lead to words,
Because in them lies your only opportunity,
And that enticing road,
That you would like to avoid.*

*Because of the labours of the old masters,
Who long laid siege to it,
Broad expanses were opened up*

For all from every corner of the earth;

But if this concern—

Is only unavoidable virtue

Because of the wise world around us,

Then thought's pathway (its edifice)

To pass through on one's own wings,

Is like a needle's eye for a camel.

(Translated by Jars Balan)

The sonnet has a typical Italian rhyme scheme with but one variation: a four-foot iambic line instead of the anticipated five, a hypercatalexis being introduced in the alternate lines in order to produce the masculine/feminine closure pattern.

Ulas Samchuk, the "Great White Father" of Ukrainian émigré writers, earned his reputation as a novelist with a book entitled *Mariia* and the trilogies *Volyn* and *Ost*—all published before he migrated to Canada. He had great difficulty in adjusting to being an émigré writer, and lapsed into literary inactivity for a long period after his arrival in Canada. His first attempt at a "Canadian Ukrainian" novel, *Na tverdii zemli* (On the Hard Earth, 1967), failed to measure up to his previous works.

Yar Slavutych, on the other hand, seems to have adjusted to Canada very well. He arrived in 1960, having lived in the United States for several years after the Second World War. In 1963 he published a massive volume of poetry in Canada, *Trofeii* (Trophies), in which he included Canadian subject matter in a section called "Northern Lights." Like other émigré poets he is much concerned with the homeland but consciously tries to synthesize his Ukrainian past with his Canadian present, as is evident in his collection entitled *Zavoioivnyky prerii* (Conquerors of the Prairies, 1968). He is a poet of classical precision, which at times mars the sincerity of his expression. His uprootedness is especially strong in *Mudroshchi mandriv* (Wisdom of Travels, 1972), a selection of poems documenting impressions from various parts of the globe.

Other collections by Slavutych are *Oaza* (Oasis, 1960) and *Maiestat* (Majesty, 1962), both of which were included in his *Trofeii*. A good example of Slavutych's neoclassical style is the sonnet below, in which the classical stanza, the elevated vocabulary and the serene philosophical theme are all united in a well-worked out poem:

*World's craving which slumbered in dreams
Burst forth with war in a sudden blaze
And the old griefs with a shadowy echo
Died in silvery wormwood.*

*Fortunate is he, whose thoughts
Domestic thought does not lure with imperishable boredom
Whose brain strives indefatigably to unravel
The mystery of evolution on the paths of discovery.*

*O universe! Your alluring distances
Ring for me through my relinquished days
Like uproars, sceptres and maces;
Take me in your ponderous embraces
Allow me to solve the riddle of your primordial expanses
And cast the lot of happiness, as my destiny.*

(Trofeii, p. 172. Translated by Jars Balan.)

Another untitled sonnet by Slavutych illustrates his ability to synthesize Ukrainian dreams with Canadian reality. The following translation is by R. M. Morrison:

*Primeval forest, like totemic bird
Cries somewhere, and here firs and pines reply,
Over dunes, intolerable storm-winds fly,
And ardent lips give out a frozen word.*

*The skyline's purple circle that conferred
Its languid present on the cloudy sky
Goes out. What dreary fields! By furrows lie
Tents set in steep nooks where the wind has stirred.*

*When branches of a forked palm are designed
And etched by hard frost on the window's blue,
A house filled with magnolias springs to mind!*

*And such joy and such sadness pierce me through
That eyes so long on snowy visions fed
Imagine there Crimea's shores instead.*

(Zavoioivnyky prerii, p. 61)

But this union of Ukrainian and Canadian images and themes is less successful when Slavutych abandons his classical stance and forays into eulogies or paeans of praise either to Ukraine and its heroes, to Canada or to individuals and groups. This is apparent in "The Conquerors of Prairies," dedicated to the Ukrainian pioneers:

*Not Corteses from some long-bygone day,
Not empires' minions grabbing without leave,
But conquerors of prairies in their way,
Came Pylypiwsky, Yelyniak, Leskiw.*

*The humble plough with home-made steel for share
Grubbed up the burnt-out poplars from their bed
To let the famed Podillian wheat lie there
In the black lap of porous earth instead.*

*And borne on golden wings the harvest came,
Drawn to their destination as by thirst.
To our Ukrainian ploughs, honour and fame:
Canada's lands you opened from the first!*

*Conquerors with a peaceful aspect and,
From one dawn to the next, tillers of soil—
Both Vilna and Myrnam well understand
The nature of your brisk and dexterous toil.*

*It's you the meadows and the groves recall:
Mundare remembers you, and Vegreville . . .
Rest well where you repose in down-soft pall,
Among the sweat-dewed fields you came to till.*

*Your arms drove roads through wooded land as they
Worked tirelessly for Canada's renown.
Grant that no plough shall now stand in your way,
And may the earth lie on you light as down!*

(Zavoioivnyky prerii, p. 7. Translated by R. M. Morrison.)

Next among the noteworthy postwar writers is the lyrical poet and humorist, Borys Oleksandriv. He wrote two humorous books under the pen

name Svyryd Lomachka—*Svyryd Lomachka v Kanadi* (Svyryd Lomachka in Canada) (1951) and *Liubov do blyznoho* (Love of a Neighbour) (1961). In 1965 his collection of poetry, *Tuha za sontsem* (Longing for the Sun), appeared, followed by *Kolokruh* in 1972. Oleksandriv's prose is permeated with satire aimed at the very heart of an émigré's life, while his poetry intertwines lyrical reminiscences with notes of satire and sarcasm:

*I didn't await either joy, or escape,
Didn't expect smiles or misfortune.
I only wanted to say "Good evening,"
But she glanced at me—and fled . . .*

*Alone and wandering outside of the city,
I brooded over the details: was it in jest, or to offend me?
And somehow it all became remarkably simple,
Everything that was hurting and burning inside of me.*

*I watched how the mountains grew dim
A warm wind touched my temples with its wings.
O, my dear friend! In her eyes—cubes of ice
But you, fool, thought there were fires.*

(**Tuha za sontsem**, p. 33. Translated by Jars Balan.)

Oleksandriv's verse, which is very conventional in structure yet quite polished in technique, is characterized by his light melodious touch and his strong predilection toward aestheticism. One feels in his poetry a sincere withdrawal into the beauty of art and a lyrical bitterness at having to confront the coarse reality of life. The following two poems illustrate Oleksandriv both in mood and form:

*In layer upon layer the gloom
Unfolds in the quiet of the gentle valleys.
You can hear the midnight murmuring
Of white firs.*

*Rustling—and far-off cries,
The voices of strange alpine hollows:
Why, queer fellow, are you walking
Alone in the night?—*

*The sight gleams with despair
—Here . . . my betrothed walked by.
Did someone call me outdoors?
Silence. Mist . . .*

*Snow, snow relentlessly sown
In the quiet, pondering valleys.
You can hear the midnight laughter
Of the white firs.*

(**Tuha za sontsem**, p. 25. Translated by Jars Balan)

*And so it is done. I burnt all of your letters,
And was saddened, as if overcome by fatigue.
As if not smoke, like a wisp, but
You melted into the unknown distances . . .*

*Burn mine . . . And once again we will be
Like wanderers who met on a bridge.
Let our two wisps rise and dissipate
And, perhaps, they will mingle together somewhere on high.*

(**Tuha za sontsem**, p. 43. Translated by Jars Balan.)

The fourth and final writer to make a significant contribution to Ukrainian émigré literature in Canada is the prolific Volodymyr Skorupsky. He has several collections dating from his arrival in Canada after the Second World War: *Moia oselia* (My Home, 1954), *Bez ridnoho poroha* (Without a Native Threshold, 1958), *Iz dzherela* (From the Source, 1961), *Nad mohyloi* (At the Grave, 1963), *Aistry nevidtsvili* (Asters Still Blooming, 1972) and *Spokonvichni Luny* (Eternal Echoes, 1977). As the titles of his first collections indicate, Skorupsky is full of nostalgia for his lost home and country. His later poetry, however, is more personal and introspective. Lyrical in tone and classical in form, it often consists of philosophical meditations.

Skorupsky seems to be at his best in the *Aistry* collection, where the anger of his first books has subsided considerably, and a certain serenity of outlook and form pervades his work. The following is a good example:

*Hurry into the orchard that like an album
Nurtures reminiscences about places and dreams.
Where with a kiss stronger than wine
Intoxicated, we weaved a distance out of hopes.
We freed the quietness from silences
About passion which grew of youthfulness and love
We did not hide into the shadows our excitement
Even if the meeting were to be our last.
And we awaited the guelder rose berries
Filled with unpricked blood
And a wreath, even out of thorns,
Did not wound our happiness nor love.*

(Aistry nevidtsvili, p. 21. Translated by Jars Balan)

Having briefly sketched the dimensions of Ukrainian émigré literature in Canada, I would like now to return to Slavutych's *Ukrainian Literature in Canada*.

Slavutych, in concluding his pamphlet, asserts that "Ukrainian literature . . . is an integral part of Canadian culture as a whole. It proves that various national groups represent a potential source of culture; they have better than average accomplishments because of the boundless opportunities this country offers everyone who is eager to retain and develop a cultural heritage brought here from Europe" (p. 15). Unfortunately, this statement is more indicative of Slavutych's own feelings of gratitude to Canada than anything based on fact. One can name only eight authors who have managed to *create literature* as émigrés, despite the impressive lists compiled by Mandryka and others. Moreover, all suffer the plight of émigrés in their persistent longing for the lost homeland and their inability to fully enter into the new culture. Emigré literature is always a dying literature, dying with the very people who produce it. The hope, of course, remains that the upcoming generation will manage to take root without losing its identity, and that perhaps a new, vibrant literature—a distinctly Ukrainian Canadian literature—will eventually emerge. Time will tell. In the meantime, the better émigré writers might usefully serve as that indispensable link between the heritage of the past and the expectations of the future—the basis of a new and distinctive art.

Notes

1. Y. Slavutych, "Ukrainian Literature in Canada" (Edmonton: Slavuta Publishers, 1966), 3.
2. M. I. Mandryka, *History of Ukrainian Literature in Canada* (Winnipeg: Ukrainian Free Academy of Sciences, 1968).
3. P. Krawchuk, *Ukrainska literatura v Kanadi* (Kiev: Dnipro, 1964), 37.
4. An abridged version was published in English: I. Kiriak, *Sons of the Soil* (Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1959).
5. Kiriak, *Sons of the Soil*, 253–4.
6. *Ibid.*, 256–8.
7. Mandryka, *History of Ukrainian Literature*, 76–7.
8. *Suchasnist*, no. 5 (May 1979): 13.

Judy Young

The Unheard Voices: Ideological or Literary Identification of Canada's Ethnic Writers

The "unheard voices" of my title is an adaptation of Marshall McLuhan's phrase "the missing voice" from his essay "Canada: The Borderline Case."¹ In his essay McLuhan comments on the lack of a sharply defined national or private identity, on the "missing face" of Canadian culture. With the "missing face" goes the "missing voice," the vehicle of expression. I do not wish to agree with McLuhan's sentiment; I am simply referring to the unheard voices of Canadian ethnic writers. The first part of my paper, then, is devoted to discovering some of these unheard voices and acting as a megaphone for them. The second part examines the range of these voices in relation to the known voices of Canadian literature and to the critical responses that have been or might be made to them.

Who are these unheard voices? Why are they unheard? Both questions have the same simple answer: they are unheard voices because they express themselves in a language other than English and French.

It is very difficult to assess the extent of this area of Canadian letters: the variety of languages involved poses insurmountable barriers to the researcher; little or no systematic effort has been made to gather information; many of the writers have been working in isolation even from their own communities; and their works, if published at all, have been printed in ethnic newspapers or published privately with the result that the material is difficult to locate.

Sporadic attempts have been made to collect bibliographic data, notably by the annual "Letters in Canada" issue of the *University of Toronto Quarterly*, which has a section devoted to publications in other languages, by *Canadian Ethnic Studies*, a journal published at the University of

Calgary and by the various communities themselves. (*Canadiana* often lists publications in other languages several years after their publication date and is far from complete, as the National Library does not always receive the mandatory copies of books printed.)

The annual review of publications in other languages in the *University of Toronto Quarterly* was started by Watson Kirkconnell in 1937. These reviews are remarkable for the variety of publications listed, considering how difficult it was to locate some of them. In 1937, for instance, items in Icelandic, German (including Mennonite poetry), Ukrainian and Yiddish are reviewed. In addition to the review, there is a ten-page bibliography listing publications in various other languages. In 1938 the section of this bibliography that lists poems published in magazines comprises Croatian, Dutch, German, Hungarian, Icelandic, Italian (only one poem), Norse, Polish, Swedish and Ukrainian. Taking another year at random, 1960, the review provides us with information about and a critical evaluation of works by Czech, Polish, Ukrainian and Icelandic writers.

In addition to his bibliographic work, Watson Kirkconnell edited the first anthology of "New Canadian" writing in translation that became available to the public at large. This was *Canadian Overtones* (Winnipeg: Columbia Press, 1935), an anthology of Canadian poetry in translation from Greek, Hungarian, Icelandic, Italian, Norwegian, Swedish and Ukrainian. In his introduction, Kirkconnell estimates that the published poetry of "New Canadians" in the first three decades of this century exceeded in quantity "all Canadian poetry published in French; while in Western Canada . . . this unknown poetry has surpassed that of Anglo-Canadians both in quantity and in quality."²

Watson Kirkconnell retired in 1965 (after almost thirty years of gathering material in different languages) and the section was taken over by C. H. Andrusyshen until 1976. For most of these ten years the title of the section was a misnomer, for it was largely, and sometimes exclusively, Ukrainian publications that were reviewed. Only in the last two years were other Slavic languages included, along with some Yiddish writings. Naturally, an unrealistically large number of reviewers would be needed for a more complete section. Nevertheless, this annual review has not created a fair or adequate impression of the state of literature written in "other languages" in Canada.

Canadian Ethnic Studies attempted a more systematic approach. In 1969, 1970 and 1976 this journal published bibliographic issues which listed authors of creative literature and imprints in Croatian, Czech, Estonian, German, Hungarian, Icelandic, Latvian, Polish, Russian, Slovak, Ukrainian and Yiddish. However, these were merely preliminary check-lists and although the journal has from time to time published

articles on ethnic literature, the systematic attempt has remained undeveloped.

On a more positive note, the most complete bibliographic source to date on the publications of various ethnic groups has recently been published on microfiche. Dr. John Miska, head librarian at the Agricultural Research Station in Lethbridge, has spent several years compiling the information for this bibliography, which contains more than 2,200 titles in over forty languages.³

Another source of information which should be available within the next two years is a series of research reports commissioned by the Multiculturalism Directorate of the Department of the Secretary of State. Six such studies are nearing completion, and several more are being planned. These studies are to provide facts about the writers of different groups, their works and their publications. (Some of the information in this paper about Hungarian and Spanish writers in Canada is taken from the first two of these research reports.)

In general, the communities themselves have not provided the researcher with bibliographic data about their own writers. Only the Ukrainians and the Germans have published extensively about the history of their literature in Canada, in English as well as in Ukrainian and German. The critical approach and the evaluation made on individual writers may be questioned, but a solid basis for study is definitely available there.

One of the chief problems confronting the researcher of this area is that to do the subject justice, one must be a linguistic genius, literary critic, historian and sociologist, all at the same time. Since I cannot claim to be such a unique individual, the following remarks cannot be considered exhaustive. In addition, my comments must be limited to the European languages. This is not because of a lack of interesting material in other languages; sadly, it is because Asian and African languages are even less accessible to most of us than the European ones. In the forty years of the existence of the other languages section of the *University of Toronto Quarterly*, there was not a single mention of a publication in an Asian language—yet in 1962, of the six foreign language daily newspapers in Canada four were Chinese.⁴ In recent years several Chinese novels and a number of volumes of Japanese and Urdu poetry have been published; a collection of Punjabi writing is about to be published in English translation, and the second translation issue of the *Canadian Fiction Magazine* (1981) contains short stories in translation from several Asian languages.

Bearing in mind that the writing and publishing of literature in other languages in Canada is closely associated with successive waves of immigration and with the social, economic and educational status of

immigrants, a number of stages may be distinguished in the development of Canadian ethnic literature.

The early settlers and pioneers expressed themselves in songs, poems, ballads and tales, most of which were handed down by word of mouth—as in the early oral traditions of European literature. “Despair, privation, hopelessness and nostalgia found an emotional escape in song. The song was the best, the most sincere and immediate friend; it kept alive a hope for a better future. It was the song that held a link with the remote, yet so dear and never to be forgotten *Ridny Kray*, the native land, with close relatives, often their own families, friends and their own people in general.”⁵ Some poems *were* written down (for instance, poems for special occasions) but were not published. One of the most remarkable manuscripts is of a long epic poem in Hungarian. This was written sometime in the first decade of this century by John Szatmari (1869–1947), who lived in the region of Bekevar-Kipling, a Hungarian farming settlement of Saskatchewan. About 140 pages of his manuscript exist, describing his life story, immigration and farming experiences.⁶

Depending on the size, the economic position and the literacy of the community, some of the works produced would be published in ethnic newspapers. Among the earliest such newspapers were those in German, Icelandic, Ukrainian, Polish and Hungarian. Because German immigration to Canada occurred relatively early and a substantial proportion of German immigrants settled in Waterloo County around 1800, it is not surprising that some of the earliest German papers were established there, for instance, the weekly *Canada Museum und Allgemeine Zeitung* (1835).⁷

The first Ukrainian newspaper in Canada (which published poetry from time to time) was *Kanadyiskii farmer*, founded in 1903 in Winnipeg; the first Polish one was *Glos kanadyski* (Winnipeg, 1904); the first Hungarian one *Kanadai magyarsag* (Winnipeg, 1905). The most unusual (and one of the earliest!) papers was the Icelandic *Framfari*, first published in 1877 at Lundi, near Gimli. The establishment of this paper defied the economic and demographic conditions necessary for the establishment of a viable ethnic publication. “The founding of a paper less than two years after the arrival of the first settlers in the colony, in a community of some fifteen hundred people, the majority of whom were destitute, and in the year of a devastating epidemic, is surely a unique achievement in the history of journalism in America, or anywhere else.”⁸ In fact, *Framfari* ran into financial problems and ceased publication in 1880. In 1883 a new publication took its place, *Leifur*, which was one of the first recipients of a federal grant. Sir John A. Macdonald promised that the government would buy 2,000 copies for distribution in Iceland. However, politics intervened

and in 1884 Ottawa revoked the subvention as a result of pressure by a group wishing to publish a rival Icelandic paper.⁹

Most of the literary efforts published in this way were poems: many depict the joys and sorrows of making a living in the new country; many also evoke (more or less successfully) the home country left behind. A large proportion of them are religious and/or moralistic in tone, as indeed a large proportion of the writers themselves were members of the clergy. In addition to the religious and nostalgic vein, there predominates a folk element in this early poetry: the "poets" use rhythms, rhymes and images well known from their folk-songs or folk-poetry back home. Presumably it was precisely the familiar ring of these verses that appealed to the reading public.

In time some works were published independently. It should be noted, however, that some of the earliest literary works produced in Canada were published elsewhere. To this category belongs the German poetry of Eugen Funcken, a Catholic priest from Waterloo County; Heinrich Rembe, a Lutheran pastor who served first in Montreal, then in various Ontario communities; and Emil Querner, a medical doctor who lived in Hamilton. Funcken published in the leading American Catholic publication in the German language (*Wahrheitsfreund*, Cincinnati) and had a volume of poetry published in 1868 also in Cincinnati. Rembe published two collections of poems; *Aus der Einsamkeit einer kanadischen Landpfarre* (Halle, ?) and *Herz und Natur* (New York, 1906). Querner also published a collection of poems, *Wilde Blumen*, in 1864 in Philadelphia.

The first anthology of Ukrainian Canadian songs was published in 1908 by Theodore Fedyk under the title *Pisni pro Kanada i Avstriiu* (Songs about Canada and Austria). This collection contained nineteen songs and poems by different authors and went through six editions between 1908 and 1927. The earliest volume of Yiddish poetry (by a single author) was *Fun Mayn Velt* (From My World) by J. I. Segal, published in 1918. The first Hungarian collection of poems was probably *Mezei Viràgok* (Prairie Flowers), which was published by Gyula Izsak in 1919. One of the earliest Mennonite works to appear was a volume of poetry by Gerhard A. Peters, *Gedichte* (Poems) (1932).

These early volumes were still devoted to poetry. However, prose soon began to make its appearance. Among the earliest novels published was *Brynjolfur Sveinsson*, a historical novel of seventeenth-century Iceland (published in Iceland in 1882). The author was Torfhildur Holm, a teacher in the Lundi settlement. The book appeared on the market in Winnipeg in 1883. Holm published several more novels, all of them dealing with Icelandic subject matter. The first Icelandic novel with Canadian subject matter was published in 1884. *Eleonora*, written by Gunnsteinn Eyjolfsson,

depicted the life of a young immigrant girl in Winnipeg and expressed "indignation against the pillars of society in the Icelandic community in Winnipeg, specifically the pillars of church society."¹⁰ Several early Ukrainian stories were published in the American periodical *Svoboda* at the turn of the century and the first volume of Ukrainian Canadian prose, *Kanadiiski opovidannia* (Canadian Stories), was published in Winnipeg in 1910 and contained four short stories describing immigrant experiences. The first full-length novel, M. Petrivsky's *Mahichne misto* (The Magic City), was not published until 1927.¹¹

The published literature of these and other European groups continued to grow in the years prior to the Second World War, the most significant contributions emanating from the Icelandic and Ukrainian communities, and with the language of expression remaining largely the mother tongue. To characterize much of the literary output of authors writing and publishing at that time in Canada in other languages, one may cite Hartmut Froeschle of the University of Toronto concerning the three early German Canadian poets mentioned above.

All three are formally and stylistically deeply rooted in the all-powerful traditions of Classicism and Romanticism which controlled German intellectual life in the nineteenth century Common to all is a didactic attitude, the desire to influence the reader The thematic tendencies of their poems arise from their differing psychological points of departure. Funcken and Rembe left their country voluntarily as missionaries, aware that they might never return. But for Querner life in North America was an exile, necessitated by political circumstances, which he endured unwillingly, hoping that it would soon end. Thus homesickness plays a larger part in the poetry of Querner than in that of the other two.¹²

The writing harks back in form and content to the traditions of the old country, for in this way the traumatic experiences (both emotional and physical) of uprooting and building a new life in a strange land can be borne more easily; one is not alone, but surrounded by a community of people sharing the same fate. The nostalgia evident in some writing is often the result of the inability of the writer to deal with the emotional problems of displacement; the more successfully a writer has managed to deal with this, the more likely he is to write from the perspective of the community.

On the whole, pioneer Ukrainian writers fit into this pattern, whereas the Icelandic ones do not. M. I. Mandryka, in his *History of Ukrainian Literature in Canada*, states with reference to the early period that it was sustained by "the insuperable historic traditions of Ukrainian culture and

self-denying love of the Ukrainian people, for their race, country and its cultural and spiritual treasures.”¹³ On the other hand, Icelandic writers conveyed their spiritual allegiance to Canada at a very early stage. For example, much of Stephan G. Stephansson’s poetry has a universal appeal: “a cardinal principle of his life-philosophy was that in striving and in progress, in the work of the pioneer and the creator, lies life’s real wealth and happiness.”¹⁴ Also Eyjolfsson’s novel of 1884, which is openly critical of some of the self-proclaimed pillars of the local Icelandic community and their values, has already been mentioned above.

With successive waves of immigration from many European countries after the Second World War, a rather different stage in the development of Canadian literature in other languages was reached. Not only was there now a much larger number of immigrants from certain countries as a result of political coercion or turmoil and racial or religious intolerance, but there was also a greater diversity in the social, educational or religious backgrounds of immigrants. For instance, most of the early Ukrainian, Polish and Hungarian immigrants had been farmers, whereas many of those who came after the war had high levels of education and professional skills. Many of the refugees who came after the Hungarian and Czechoslovakian upheavals were intellectuals. A large number of the new immigrants were Jewish, whereas before the majority had been Catholic.

With the new influx, there gradually developed a considerable body of literature in languages hitherto more or less silent in Canada: Czech, Estonian, Latvian, Lithuanian, Russian, Slovak, Croatian, Italian, Romanian and Spanish. Among the more significant authors of this new generation are, in Czech: Pavel Javor, Jan Drabek and Josef Skvorecky; in Estonian: Salme Ekbaum and Arved Viirlaid; in Latvian: Irma Grebzde; in Spanish: Manuel Betanzos Santos and Ludwig Zeller. Some major writers emerge in this period, particularly among groups with a literary prehistory in Canada, such as the Germans, Hungarians and Poles. Walter Bauer, George Faludy, Robert Zend, Wacław Iwaniuk and Bogdan Czaykowski are good examples from the above groups.

During the present period the more established groups have set up publishing programmes, making available to their communities the works of their writers in individual volumes and in anthologies. They have formed literary circles with regular meetings and have founded research institutes to undertake, among other tasks, critical evaluations of their writers. At the same time, a younger generation of writers has turned to English or French as its medium, causing, in the case of some of the older communities, much anguish at the possibility of the disappearance of their culture.

To cite some examples, there is an active Mennonite Literary Society in Winnipeg with a publishing programme. The National Committee for Yiddish of the Canadian Jewish Congress has been systematically publishing the work of Yiddish writers. The Hungarian Writers' Association in Toronto has published several anthologies, including one in English translation. The Polish Canadian Research Institute, the Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies and a number of Ukrainian writers' associations have also played an active part in publishing for their communities. One of the more recent literary clubs is the Canadian-Yugoslav Press, Radio, TV and Writers' Club, initiated in Montreal in 1976. Also very recent and very active are several Spanish literary associations organized mostly by Chileans (e.g., the Latin Report Publications Society in Edmonton and a writers' association in Ottawa). There are currently about thirty writers consistently working in Spanish in Canada. To characterize briefly the veritable "boom" of the last few decades in Canadian literature in other languages is an impossible task, for this period is by far the most complex, the most exciting and most deserving of study. To date, however, it has not been investigated adequately and therefore remains largely unknown and unappreciated.

George Bisztray, of the recently established Chair of Hungarian Language and Literature at the University of Toronto, made a study of Hungarian writers in Canada that examines the historical stages referred to above and analyzes in detail the most recent phase.¹⁵ He concludes that a lively minority literature depends, for its existence and development, on an influx of appropriate immigrants. It is thus a first-generation phenomenon. This is borne out by the fact that both Icelandic and Ukrainian literature have declined in recent decades.

So much for the "unheard voices." That they have remained largely unheard—despite sporadic translations, Colombo's "Canadian Poets," occasional mentions in magazines, and the three existing representative anthologies (*Volvox* and the two translation issues of the *Canadian Fiction Magazine*: 1976 and 1981)—can be seen from an editorial by Sam Solecki, which appeared in the August 1979 issue of *Canadian Forum*. (A magazine, incidentally, which has published the works of some of these unknown writers.) Solecki makes his point with the following quiz:

I will be surprised if even one percent of our readers can name the novel by a world-famous Canadian author that 1) was published in 1972 (the same year as *The Manticore*); 2) was not reviewed by a single Anglophone monthly magazine or daily newspaper; 3) was published in France in 1979 by Gallimard to become the fifth book by this author on the Gallimard list; and 4) will never appear on any course devoted to Canadian literature.

The novel is *Mirakl* (68 Publishers) or *Miracle en Bohème* (Gallimard) and it is almost unknown in Canadian literary circles even though another of the author's novels, *The Cowards*, is a Penguin Modern Classic, while a third *The Bass Saxophone*, has received excellent reviews in the *Forum*, *The New York Times*, *Newsweek* and *Saturday Review*, and was named by the *Guardian* as the best foreign novel of the year.

We all know, of course, that the author is Josef Skvorecky but if Solecki's guess is right, the Canadian literary establishment does not. Solecki argues that we should acknowledge and encourage our ethnic writers because they can help us in the struggle against "American cultural hegemony" by relating us to values other than American ones.

How should we evaluate Canadian ethnic literature? Professor Froeschle comments that "The important function of the literature of a minority in building a community and in upholding traditions has often been recognized. The question of its aesthetic value, particularly if raised with narrow-mindedness, and confronted with inadequate methods, is of minor importance in such literature. These admittedly epigonous works [three early German poets] pose interesting problems, as well as offering many insights, to anyone interested in cultural history and sociology of literature."¹⁶

On this same question, M. I. Mandryka, in the conclusion of his *History of Ukrainian Literature in Canada*, provides the following analysis: "... the history of Ukrainian literature in Canada cannot be written on the basis of chronological changes of literary currents, styles, schools and abstract searches. In this, its young period of growth, it has no place for such. Its history is a logical process of the development of literary arts and ideas in the process of the wholesome social growth of the Ukrainian Canadian society itself. It is a reflection and a record of the social progress."¹⁷

Watson Kirkconnell summarizes the significance of Canadian literature in other languages as follows: "Taken together, these minor literatures present an unrivalled picture of human predicament, of lives uprooted from a country and planted afresh with difficulty in Canadian soil."¹⁸ New Canadian poetry, according to him, would help to develop "a Canadianism nourished by pride in the individual's racial past."¹⁹

These critical views are characteristic of those who have worked on this dimension of Canadian literature. The majority of the critics operate from an ideological rather than a literary standpoint. The function of a literature in another language is perceived to be—particularly in the case of East Europeans from politically oppressed countries—the preservation of

the cultural heritage which is threatened by erosion and extinction in the home country. This often leads to uncritical and even partisan interpretations such as Mandryka's less than one page critique of Vera Lysenko, which dismisses the author's two novels because of her alleged "pro-communist tendencies."²⁰

This ideological rather than literary orientation is not restricted to those critics who are especially concerned with ethnic Canadian literature. Some of the best known Canadian literary critics employ a surprisingly similar terminology with reference to Canadian literature in general. A look at the following examples will confirm this.

Canadian literary criticism consistently seeks its organizing principles not only in theories of modern literature but in historical and social contexts.²¹

Modern criticism in Canada has become a strikingly effective social instrument. It serves as a vehicle of political comment and social awareness. It seeks a central role in the development of national consciousness. It aspires to the attainment of cultural coherence.²²

The approach of another critic is "cultural and psychological rather than purely aesthetic or literary."²³

These opinions are voiced not by unknown or little-known critics with reference to Canadian literature in other languages; they are the voices of two of Canada's best known literary critics (and poets), Eli Mandel and D. G. Jones respectively. Admittedly, both are aware of the dangers of such non-literary interpretation: dangers of over-simplification, of blurring the distinction between writers, of "assuming a relationship between literature and life that can never be defined with precision."²⁴

Other critics are less wary of these dangers. I would fault Moss' *Patterns of Isolation* just as I find fault with Mandryka's or Froeschle's comments. Moss' analyses of the patterns of isolation and exile establish that these patterns exist in Canadian literature but do not explain what makes them *Canadian*. Similarly, a great deal of ethnic critical writing describes the themes and patterns of Canadian literature in other languages without attempting to define in what way these are specifically Ukrainian, Hungarian, Spanish or German Canadian. Thematically, for instance, there are many parallels between the development of the European literatures in Canada and the so-called mainstream of Canadian literature; the "immigrant experience," the "garrison mentality," the aspirations for national or group identity are certainly common to both.

It is easy to point out problems and inadequacies, but difficult to find satisfactory solutions. I have tried to point out some of the inadequacies in the criticisms of both our "ethnic" and "mainstream" Canadian writers. However, I have not been able to discuss the question of the identity of the ethnic writer. Is it someone who writes in a non-official language in Canada and must remain isolated in order to continue? Is it someone who writes in one of the official languages but has some special alternative cultural sensibility to convey (back to non-literary identification)? In other words, how are Laura Salverson and Bill Valgardson different as Canadian writers from fellow Icelandic writers who have written in Icelandic? How is Andy Suknaski different from Yar Slavutych?; George Jonas and Robert Zend from Gyorgy Jonas and Robert Zend? (since they write in English and Hungarian); Rudy Wiebe from Arnold Dyck; Pier Giorgio di Cicco from Luigi Romeo and Joy Kogawa from T. Hiramatus?

And finally, I have certainly not solved the greatest problem of criticism, which has always been "to work with a sound understanding of the relationship between literary qualities and the values of life in general; the major errors have come either from treating literature too simply in terms of general ethics, or from trying to explain literary values in dissociation from other values."²⁵ But if we can make the best of the unheard voices heard, we should be well on the way to some tentative solutions at least.

Notes

1. *The Canadian Imagination: Dimensions of a Literary Culture*, ed. D. Staines (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England: Harvard University Press, 1977), 243.
2. W. Kirkconnell, *Canadian Overtones* (Winnipeg: Columbia Press, 1935), 3.
3. J. Miska, *Ethnic and Native Canadian Literature, 1850-1979: A Bibliography of Primary and Secondary Materials* (Lethbridge: Microform Biblos, 1980), microfiche.
4. W. Kirkconnell, "Foreign Language Publications in Canada," (an address to the Joint Conference of the Canadian Library Association and the Ontario Library Association, Ottawa, Ontario, 25 June 1962), 10.
5. M. I. Mandryka, *History of Ukrainian Literature in Canada* (Winnipeg: Ukrainian Free Academy of Sciences, 1968), 31.
6. M. Kovacs, "Some Early Canadian Literary Gems of Saskatchewan," *Second Banff Conference on Central and East European Studies*, April 1978, 55-85.
7. The first German paper in Canada was *Die Welt, und die Neuschottlaendische Correspondenz*, Halifax, 1787. H. Boeschenstein, "Das

- Studium der deutschkanadischen Prese—ein fruchtbares Arbeitsfeld" in *German Canadian Yearbook 1*, ed. H. Froeschle (Toronto, 1973), 41.
8. W. Kristjanson, *The Icelandic People in Manitoba* (Winnipeg: Wallingford Press, 1965), 60.
9. Kristjanson, *Icelandic People in Manitoba*, 191.
10. Kristjanson, *Icelandic People in Manitoba*, 492.
11. Based on Y. Slavutych, "Ukrainian Literature in Canada: Main Trends," chapter from a draft manuscript of "A Heritage in Transition: Essays in the History of Ukrainians in Canada," ed. M. Lupul, Multiculturalism Directorate, Department of the Secretary of State, Ottawa.
12. *Eugen Funcken, Heinrich Rembe, Emil Querner*, ed. H. Froeschle (Toronto: German Canadian Historical Association, 1978), 19–20.
13. Mandryka, *History of Ukrainian Literature*, 45.
14. Kristjanson, *Icelandic People in Manitoba*, 487.
15. "Canadian-Hungarian Literature," a research report submitted to the Multiculturalism Directorate, Department of the Secretary of State, Ottawa, July 1979.
16. *Eugen Funcken*, 21.
17. Mandryka, *History of Ukrainian Literature*, 240.
18. "A Canadian," *Saturday Night*, 9 January 1943, 8.
19. Kirkconnell, *Canadian Overtones*, 5.
20. Mandryka, *History of Ukrainian Literature*, 111.
21. E. Mandel, *Contexts of Canadian Criticism* (Toronto and Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 1977), vii.
22. E. Mandel, *Another Time* (Press Procépic, 1977), 7.
23. D. G. Jones, *Butterfly Rock* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1970), 4.
24. Jones, *Butterfly Rock*, 4.
25. J. Harvey, "F. R. Leavis, An Appreciation," *Encounter* (May 1979): 62.

Seymour Levitan

An Introduction to Canadian Yiddish Writers

My main purpose in this paper is to introduce the work of Rochl Korn to a larger audience. Rochl Korn is a major Yiddish poet and, as I see it, an important Canadian writer. There are other important Canadian Yiddish writers, among them the poets Melech Ravitch and Y. Y. Segal. I cannot begin to do justice to them in a short paper. But I will summarize what I know of their work and comment briefly on the range of Canadian Yiddish writing.

First, as background to the Canadian Yiddish writers, a few words about Yiddish literature in general. The Yiddish language began in the Rhineland about the year 1000. It is a Germanic language with an important element of Hebrew vocabulary in it, much as English has an important element of Latin vocabulary, except that the Hebrew element in Yiddish has always been necessary as the vocabulary of day-to-day religious practice. When large numbers of Jews moved into Poland and Ukraine after the Black Death of the mid-fourteenth century, Yiddish acquired an element of Slavic vocabulary and adopted patterns of word-formation from Slavic languages.

Modern Yiddish literature dates from the second half of the nineteenth century, when the Yiddish language achieved intellectual respectability in the works of writers who created an image of contemporary Jewish life and character. Modern Yiddish literature is an expression of the change in Jewish identity that was felt toward the end of the last century with the emergence of the Jewish people from isolation into the modern world. There were new attempts at self-assessment by the Jewish people, new directions and the entirely new possibility that the people might lose its identity in the Western world. The classic Yiddish prose writers, Mendele Mokher S'forim, Sholem Aleichem and Y. L. Peretz, published most of

their work between 1880 and the end of the First World War. Their writing had an immediate impact on millions of Yiddish readers and a lasting influence on succeeding generations of Yiddish writers. Every Yiddish writer since then has known Mendeleyev's image of the Jewish Don Quixote, Benyomin the Third, and his Sancho Panza, Senderl the Woman, who set out on picaresque adventures in their attempt to escape the confinement of *shtetl* life; every contemporary Yiddish writer knows Sholom Aleichem's version of the marriage of the impractical and the practical type, his Menachem Mendl, the *luftmentsh*, the man who lives on air, with a thousand schemes for striking it rich, and his wife Sheyne Sheyndl, who sees through all his words and waits for him to come back down to earth; and every Yiddish writer knows Peretz's skeptic, who learns how to accept folk belief as a basis of his own identity—the doubter who finally says yes, the Nemirover Rebbe does go up to heaven each year, “if not higher,” and makes the old beliefs a vehicle for his own ethics. These are images of Jewish character that have stuck, that have helped give form to modern Jewish identity and the work of other writers. The vitality of Yiddish literature has continued to the present. The years since 1918 in particular have been a time of brilliant Yiddish poetry. The main centres of Yiddish writing between the wars were the Soviet Union, Poland and the United States. After the Second World War, European Yiddish writers dispersed to France, North and South America, Israel and Australia.¹

In different lands Yiddish literature has taken root differently. Canadian Yiddish writing is a part of Canadian Jewish writing. Yiddish writing in Canada does not tell much about the new experience of being Canadian. There are landscape poems by a number of writers,² a book-length autobiographical poem, *In kanade* (In Canada), by Sholem Shtern and a well-known memoir of Jewish farm life in Saskatchewan, *Oksn un motorn* (Oxen and Motors).³ But the literature that presents Canadian Jewish experience in detail has been written in English by Adele Wiseman, Mordechai Richler, A. M. Klein and others, though underlying themes in their works are the same as the themes of Yiddish literature in Canada.

There is an impressive amount of Canadian Yiddish writing by more than a dozen poets and a number of prose writers, many of whom came to Canada during and after the Second World War. The most distinguished names in Canadian Yiddish writing have been the poets Rochl Korn, Melech Ravitch and Y. Y. Segal. Their writing is known wherever Yiddish literature is read, and recently some of it has been translated into English. There are a number of other Canadian Yiddish poets of note, among them Mordechai Husid, Ish Yair, Ida Maza, Peretz Miranski, M. M. Shaffir, Sholem Shtern and Yudica. There are some noted novelists and story

writers as well: Yehuda Elberg, Chava Rosenfarb and Jacob Zipper. In 1979, Chava Rosenfarb was awarded the prestigious Manger Prize for Literature for her three-volume novel of the Holocaust in Yiddish, *Der boym fun lebn* (The Tree of Life), and Elberg's work has been highly praised by critics and successful with the Yiddish-reading public. He was awarded the Y. Y. Segal Prize and the Manger prize for his novel *Afn shpits fun a mast* (At the Tip of a Mast) and is currently working on a cycle of novels dealing with the Holocaust and its aftermath.

Of all these writers, Rochl Korn is the one whose work I know best and value the most. I will comment briefly on the work of Melech Ravitch and Y. Y. Segal and then discuss Rochl Korn's poetry in detail.

Zekharye Bergner, who took the pen name Melech Ravitch, was born in 1893 in East Galicia, now part of Soviet Ukraine. He was one of the leading figures in the Yiddish literary life of Warsaw between the world wars. It has been said that all the young Yiddish writers in Poland in the twenties and thirties knew him or turned to him for recognition and evaluation of their work. However, he left Poland in the late thirties, and in the forties settled in Montreal, where he lived, with some interruptions, until his death in 1976.⁴ In the thirties he wrote a poetry of wandering, and to the end he was often a poet between two worlds, uncertain where he could put his feet down. In his later poems, the two worlds often represent two realities, and though he still wrote of the pathos of losing all worlds, he also distanced himself from his immediate emotions in a number of poems and wrote with a kind of calm mysticism about the cycles of rest and restlessness. His collected poems and the three volumes of his autobiography are his best-known works.

"Tropic Nightmare in Singapore" is a good example of Ravitch's poetry of wandering. It is a ballad-like poem that ends with an adaptation of a well-known Yiddish folk song. "Once there was a story," the song says, "a story that begins/ there was a Jewish king." The word for king in the song is *melech*, and so with a play on the meaning of his name, Melech Ravitch tells of "a Jewish singer who was king."^{*}

*Seven worlds, seven seas,
two and forty years—
I lie here stung
by equatorial nightmares and fears.*

*Waking eyes, naked heart,
a mosquito eats my blood*

*All translations from the Yiddish in this paper are the author's.

*and hum hum hums my head
its bloody song.*

*O'er seven worlds and seas
the fire-wind's wings
bring me a dream
that takes me home.*

*O'er seven worlds and seas,
my shtetl and a fair,
and the mosquito hum hum hums
my head its air.*

*O'er seven worlds and seas,
our market-place, a fair,
and the sill
where my parents stand and stare
at the train on the hill*

*and turn when it's gone
to the kitchen
and the window
with the graveyard beyond.*

*Nightmares and death-fears,
fevered and overwrought
my eyes open on a thought
that cuts like lightning.*

*That all the seven worlds and seas
were dreams,
only dreams
my two and forty years.*

*All at once my mother smiles,
my father laughs out loud,
"Of course, you fool of worlds and seas,
come to us and see
what the real world is about.*

*On one side of our house
is a hill where we see the train,
on the other side
we see the graveyard plain.*

*There your parents' parents rest
two hundred years or more,
time to rest, son, rest,
after two and forty years,
equator, Singapore."*

*"The thing you were living for—"
I see my mother's face—
"Do you still believe the world is more
than our market-place?"*

*I'll throw the seven worlds
out the kitchen window,
I'll throw the seven seas you've sailed
out in the kitchen pail.*

*Sit at my feet, my son,
lay your head in my lap,
all of it was a dream,
and now the dream is done.*

*Take seven pennies for your zeal
and buy two apples;
bite and see
what in the world is real.*

*Help me light the lamp,
make the kitchen fire,
take your shoes off, son,
your feet are tired.*

*Lay down the thoughts
that oppress,
lay down the burden
on your shoulders, son, and rest*

*in the bed
where you slept as a boy,
I'll cover the lamp
so the light won't annoy you.*

*Froyim, you're tired,
you need rest,
I'll sing our tired boy
the air he loves the best.*

*'Once there was a story
all the world would sing,
a story that begins:
There was a Jewish singer who was king.*

*The singer sailed away
o'er seven worlds and seas,
sailed 'till he came home again
to take his ease.*

*The king his eyes are wet with tears,
his sail is furled,
in all the seven worlds and seas
he never found the world.*

*In all the seven worlds
and seas he was alone,
the singer who was king
always sailed alone.*

*O'er seven worlds and seas,
poor boy forlorn,
'Tell me, mother, my old mother,
why was I ever born?'*

*And the mother wailed
and wept for her son,
and she held the singer
who was king in her arms.*

*The light in the lamp flickered
and blackened the glass,
'I had to give birth to you, son,
so that your life could pass.'*

*Once there was a story
sad enough to sing,
a story that begins:
There was a Jewish singer who was king.'"*
(1935)⁵

Yakov-Yitskhok Segal (in English Jacob Isaac or J. I. Segal) was born in Ukraine in 1896. He came to Canada in 1911, tried living in New York for a few years in the twenties, but returned to Montreal, where he lived until his death in 1954.⁶ He is a lyricist of complicated progressions of feelings. He passes through moods of disruption or loss to a moment of elevation, as if a door opened suddenly to release him or allow a welcome guest to enter. In many of his poems there is a rush of feeling, resolved in a muted, silvered, singing tone. Segal was a prolific writer and has a considerable reputation as a poet. In all, he published fourteen volumes of verse. *Sefer yiddish* (The Book of Yiddish) is considered by many to be his most important volume.

"A Song About My Son" strikes me as typical of many of Segal's poems. It is one of the poems in which he moves from one state of mind to another. He begins in one world and ends in another. It is as if he writes until he surprises himself in that other world. In this poem he ends on the threshold of yet another state of mind. The flow of feelings carries him forward to the next strong possibility—suggested by the snake that coils around the pillars of the temple—and stops there.

*I have shelves of old books
where I dig for gold,
the tales I tell my son.*

*When I have no time—
the weekdays take away my time
and turn it to dust and sand
and need—*

*my beautiful son holds off.
He lets me be.
All he asks of me is a book from the shelves.*

*I grant him that. He stands on a stool,
turning pages
and searching,
very thoughtful, very deep.*

*He lights on something,
something moving,
but a look at me and he catches himself
and the word he was about to say.*

*He returns to turning pages,
and buries his head in one book after another.
my wonderful, zealous,
understanding seven-year old.*

*I get up out of my corner. I go to him
and look straight into his eyes.
Where are you at, Reb Nachum?
Wandering in world after world?*

*And I start to chant the tale
of the temple. How it was built,
the copper lions, the deer,
the sacred bread*

*and the seven branched Menorah.
The white wicks burn bright
and the high priest stands at the threshold
in deep blue and purple robes.*

*And the chant lifts as if of itself
like a golden crown.
Then open wide ye gates.
God in his glory has come.*

*I lift up my head to walls and corners
in the quiet after sunset.
I see a golden snake coiled
on the pillars of the temple.⁷*

Rochl Korn has lived in Canada since shortly after the Second World War. She was born in 1898 in a village in Galicia, Poland. Her family had owned and managed farm land for several generations. At a time when nearly all European Jews lived in the big centres of population or in *shtetlakh*—the Jewish market towns that had no direct connection to the land—Rochl Korn grew up in a village among Jews who were less isolated from the peasants and were themselves farmers. In writing about her home, she introduced into Yiddish literature a new subject matter. Her first poems were in Polish, but after the First World War she chose to write in Yiddish.⁸ Her early works were the two volumes of poems *Dorf* (Village) (1928) and *Royter mon* (Red Poppies) (1937) and the brilliant collection of stories *Erd* (Land) (1936). The landscape and the farm setting are part of the people in many of these early works. “I am soaked through

by you like earth soaked by spring rain," she says in her love poem "To You." She is as much the landscape as herself in this poem:

*I am soaked through by you like earth soaked by spring
rain,
and my blondest day
hangs at the pulse of your word
like a bee at the blossoming linden.*

*I am over you like the promise of harvest
when the wheat comes up even with the rye.*

*My fingertips drop devotion
on your tired head—
And my years,
furrows in the field,
ripen and fill
with the pain of loving you,
beloved man.⁹*

The village poems are often lyrical anecdotes or narratives. In "Village Morning" a farm girl goes to the well. The situation provides a context for a pleasant sensuality and for the intimation of the girl's love-longing. She wakes, stretches, and still warm with sleep, looks around to see whether the neighbour's son is going by with his horses. Then she puts the hard yoke on her arms and goes to the well. The water cans and the well have a living presence, and in the end the girl's experience becomes their experience, they live in her thoughts:

*The cans dance, swing at her sides
to the rhythm of her singing steps
and rub up against her legs through her thin dress.
And when they go down into the well,
their mouths all dry with sleep, and swallow
the cool morning drink at the mossy bottom,
a muffled voice in the depths laughs
"Bul, bul,"
and tells them secrets*

*that they dream about all day
in their cobweb-softened corner near the door.¹⁰*

It is characteristic of Rochl Korn to fuse the person and the setting in this way.

"Crazy Levi" is one of Rochl Korn's most effective narrative lyrics. Levi is a shadow on the road, a smell the dogs know. When the peasant women, "broken in the middle like sheaves," ask him why he doesn't marry, "a red berry would blossom/ in the dark moss around his lips:/ Levi's crazy, melancholy smile." The landscape is part of him, he is part of the landscape, and eventually disappears, perhaps like an intimation when it isn't put into words. He is one of the lonely, lost figures that Rochl Korn is drawn to, one of the homeless whom she saves from non-existence.

*And no one knows what became of him, Crazy Levi,
who tied the roads
from Yaverev to Moshtsisk
to Samber to Greyding in a bow,
carrying always in his bosom pocket
his letters to Rivtshe,
his uncle's youngest daughter.*

*All the houses in the villages knew him,
the road accepted his long shadow
like a horse that knows its rider,
and the dogs lay quiet in their doghouses
when the familiar smell of Levi's flaring black coat tails
spoke to their hearts.*

*Women broken in the middle like sheaves
were in the field when Levi came by.
They toyed with him.
and with a laugh that smelled of goodness, like dark bread,
they would say,
"Levi, you have no father or mother.
Why don't you take a wife
like the rest of your people?
She would wash your shirt for you
and cook you a spoonful of something warm for supper."*

*And Levi would look at their raw, swollen feet
and plow the brown field of his forehead
with the painful thought that was always present to him:*

*"Because my uncle wouldn't give me his daughter for a wife.
I carry my heart around
like a cat in a sack,
and I want to leave it somewhere
so that it won't be able to find its way back to me."*

*And he would take a filthy piece of paper
out of his bosom pocket
and read aloud from a letter in German,
"An Liebchen!"—
and a red berry would blossom
in the dark moss around his lips:
Levi's crazy, melancholy smile.*

*But after one long hard winter,
worse than any the old people could remember,
the small eyes of the windowpanes
looked for Levi without finding him
and the dogs put their heads to the ground
and sniffed at all the tracks on the road,
thinking he might have come by—*

*And to this day, no one knows what became of him.
Maybe the hungry wolves in the woods tore him to pieces
or maybe his mother who hung herself in her youth
missed her son, and a small, white hand
reached out to him from the dark attic of the old house.¹¹*

In an interview in the Yiddish journal *Zayn* in 1967, Rochl Korn speaks of the purposes of poetry. She says:

There are hidden things that people pass by without noticing. For example, a tree out in the middle of a field, lost and alone, or a person who has been shamed. Then the poet comes along and reveals what no one else has noticed. He sees it, he feels it. I can compare it to the tale of the sleeping princess who was enchanted by a wicked witch and was neither dead nor alive. She lay between death and life, and only the one with great love could wake her with a kiss. It's the same with the poet. Things that are asleep, that haven't found a voice, that haven't had their breakthrough—the poet sees them, he comes and discovers these things behind the seven skins of actuality and wakes them to life with the kiss of his word.¹²

When she says "a tree out in the middle of a field, lost and alone," she means exactly that. For Rochl Korn, anything may be an enchanted princess, an outcast king, and she feels called on to serve all things that are abandoned. "Everything lonely has the color of my grief," she says in a poem which reiterates her sense of purpose. It is a lyric statement of the ideas expressed in the interview:

*Everything lonely has the color of my grief,
everything shamed and tired
stands in a crown of extinguished stars
at the first word of my poem.*

*Lost beggars, outcast princes,
forgotten smiles, unwept tears—
who will bow and invite you in,
all of you, when I'm gone?¹³*

Here is an essential part of Rochl Korn's identity. She gathers in the lost, she gives them a place of refuge, she helps redeem them from exile.

The person in Korn's life who was most able to do these things was her mother. Her mother was at the centre of her life, and in her poetry she is the symbol of simple, open compassion. Her word and her look provided a place of refuge for anyone who needed a home. Rochl Korn addresses her in "To My Mother, in place of the stone that would have marked her grave."

*Only you were fated to guide the wisdom of the heart
whole to the threshold of your lips,
so that the word would be home and daily bread
for all who were turned away by love.*

*... only you were given
the encircling gaze, like a roof, like a wall,
that took into itself everything that was abandoned and
alone,
from a sick swallow to a shamed, outstretched hand.¹⁴*

Village, earth and mother were home for Rochl Korn. She lost her home and all her family but her daughter in the Holocaust. One of her

postwar volumes of poems, *Heym un heymlodzikeyt* (Home and Homelessness, 1948), in effect announces the great division of themes in her poetry. She uses the term *na v'nod* (wandering) countless times in her later poetry. Her own wandering and exile now became a major theme of her work, along with a continued sense of obligation to speak for the lost. Now the lost also included the dead destroyed in the war. Her mother's word had served as "home and daily bread/ for all who were turned away by love." More than ever since the war Rochl Korn has felt the need to serve with her word. "All that relied on my word," she writes, "ripened in grief, / alone / on the shore/ of bitter hurt." She feels the call of the lost and the abandoned as the breath of a word in search of a voice. "From the colorless valleys" comes

*... a sound, small
as the softest call,
as the budding of intimation—
and on my face,
my brow,
I feel the breath of a word
burdened
with unwept tears.*¹⁵

Rochl Korn feels forever in debt, subject to a voice that tells her, "You have not yet written all that you must."¹⁶ The need to pay that debt calls her back to life when she feels the pull to dissolution, the longing to dissolve in twilight, which she often writes about.

*I wonder how much grief
this evening
took from me,
so still,
so lost in thought,
and so weighed down
by all the sadness of dissolution
and the weeping
no one hears.*

*The sun
hangs
in the cobweb-clouds,
a trapped bee,*

*and the familiar forest
suddenly is alien and far away,
as if it turned from me
and every comfort.*

*Over the wide green meadow
the fog ascends in white veils,
like a river pouring by
and flowing out to the shore of night,
along with me.¹⁷*

There gradually emerged in Rochl Korn's poetry a new theme: the crucial importance to her of the word. "Only the word, only the poem is mine," she says in one of her later collections.¹⁸ The word binds her to the home she lost; home is now "on the other side of the poem."

*On the other side of the poem there is an orchard,
and in the orchard, a house with a roof of straw,
and three pine trees,
three watchmen who never speak, standing guard.*

*On the other side of the poem there is a bird,
yellow brown with a red breast,
and every winter he returns
and hangs like a bud in the naked bush.*

*On the other side of the poem there is a path
as thin as a hairline cut,
and someone lost in time
is treading the path barefoot, without a sound.*

*On the other side of the poem amazing things may happen,
even on this overcast day,
this wounded hour
that breathes its fevered longing in the window pane.*

*On the other side of the poem my mother may appear
and stand in the doorway for a while lost in thought
and then call me home as she used to call me home long
ago:
You've played enough, Rachel. Don't you see it's night?¹⁹*

The poem is her present home, her refuge. "Don't shame my word," she says in a poem addressed to God, like so many of her later poems. And when she has let the creative moment slip by, she feels guilty and bereft.

In the interview that I quoted earlier, she describes the call to creativity and the terrible feeling of letting the moment pass:

I mentioned earlier that a mood, a feeling takes hold of me and that I don't know what to do about it. I can't explain it, and I don't know what evokes it. It's as if an unknown force suddenly surges up in me and struggles against me body and soul and actually tries to crush me. I feel a kind of closeness in me, as if the whole world is narrowed down to four walls that are moving together and pressing me in a vise. And I have the feeling that I am going to drown or choke and that I must tear myself out, find a crack, see at least a shore of sky ahead. In that situation, if I am able to write a poem, it's pure happiness. But if for various reasons I don't write, I feel an unexplainable dissatisfaction and anger at myself for a long time after. In one of my poems . . . about an unwritten poem [I tell] how the barren paper laments in my hand. And it seems to me that God has covered his face in a cloud, and I stand shamed at my door. That's the feeling I have. But when I have written my poem, I could throw myself on the floor like a child and roll around in sheer joy. It's such an easing, such a deliverance.²⁰

The poem she refers to is another important statement of her purpose, her sense of obligation, and her crucial need to be a poet.

*Last night I felt a poem on my lips,
a luscious fruit, sweet and tart,
but it dissolved into my blood at dawn,
all but its smell and color gone.*

*I hear the quiet pulsebeat in the stammering of things
that might have come into the open,
abandoned, their heart shut tight,
and no pleading now will lure them out.*

*Every part of me has died an early death,
my head is bowed in mourning to the ground.
God called me to renew Creation
and I failed to hear His word.*

*The day paled at the start.
God's face is covered with a cloud.*

*Left with a barren sheet of paper in my hand,
I stand shamed at my door
like a stranger.²¹*

Rochl Korn's poems addressed to God are sometimes prayer, sometimes challenge and at least in one important instance—the poem “Job”—a plain questioning of all belief in God. Rochl Korn's “Job” is one of her strongest “Holocaust poems,” though in one sense all the poems about her homelessness and loss are Holocaust poems. In some she refers plainly to the killing of her mother and her brothers, but in “Job” she presents the most important problem of all for a believing person. Job is the symbol of belief in God confronted by God's apparent capriciousness. Job's seven sons and three daughters are taken from him; in the end he is given another seven sons and three daughters and expected to be joyful. In Rochl Korn's poem, Job cries out:

*How can I be joyful?
I am riper now by three and seven deaths.
I have buried ten of my dead in my blood.
I have long since wept for everything that was worth a tear.
I no longer weep or laugh at anything.*

It is characteristic of Rochl Korn that her Job is especially troubled by the thought that present comfort could make him forget and undo all that binds him to the home he lost. “Do you want me to forget it all?” he asks. “There's no longer any sense to your will, Lord.” And so, presumably, no more sense to belief, yet Rochl Korn's Job ends still addressing God: “Who can restore my greatest loss/ Who can take your place, my God?”²² This poem, based on the biblical tradition of dialogue with God, is clearly Jewish in tone as well as theme, and this brings me to what must be the most important question in a discussion of ethnic identities in Canadian literature: what makes the ethnic writer ethnic? In this case, what is Jewish about Rochl Korn's writing?

Her Jewishness is in her identification with the lost, the homeless, the abandoned; in her intense understanding of exile, almost as if her poems were a way of *oprikhtn goles*—taking exile upon oneself in order somehow to shorten the people's exile. Her Jewishness is also the source of her sense of obligation to help bring about the redemption, or as she puts it, to bring

the outcast prince and the lost beggar out into the open, to reveal them and to give them a voice. To her, the witnessing of exile is in itself a redemptive act. Exile and the need to help bring an end to exile—these are the Jewish themes and obsessions in Rochl Korn's work.

She is a wonderfully intelligent and feeling writer who has continued to develop in style and theme through the years. Her earlier work is grounded in a particular landscape, her later work tends more toward a clear, lyrical expression of her loss, her yearning back and her present identity. She has published eleven books, eight of them since 1948. Some of her poems and stories have appeared in translation, more are being translated and she continues to write and publish new work.²³ One of her strongest beliefs is that poetry itself is her lifeline. I would like to finish this discussion of her work with one of her recent poems, about the word:

*All that was true and put forth leaves
anew each day,
the tree of ever-new understanding
shielding
my childhood,
swims away,
so far away,
so far—
and I with all my will clutch the word,
tail of the imaginary bird
that lifts me over
barren days
and gulfs of night
to the heights
of dream
and longing,
to the firmament
where a new genesis is being dreamt
by the sleeping stars.²⁴*

Notes

1. For more on Yiddish literature in general and modern Yiddish poetry in particular, see I. Howe and E. Greenberg, eds., *A Treasury of Yiddish Stories* (New York: The Viking Press, 1953), 1–93; *A Treasury of Yiddish Poetry* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1969), “Introduction”; and other anthologies of Yiddish literature in translation edited by I. Howe.
2. See S. Rojansky, ed., *Kanadish-antologie*, Musterverk 62 (Buenos Aires: literatur-gezelshaft baym Yivo in argentine, 1974).
3. See appended bibliographies: “Selected Works by Canadian Yiddish Writers” and “Canadian Yiddish Writing in English Translation.” For more on Canadian Yiddish poetry, see H. M. Caiserman-Wital, *Idishe dikhter in kanade* (Montreal: Farlag Nyuansn, 1934); and Kh. L. Fuks, *100 yor yidishe un hebraishe literatur in kanade* (Montreal: Kh. L. Fuks bukh komitet, 1980).
4. See “Melech Ravitch,” in *Encyclopedia Judaica* (Jerusalem: Keter Publishing House, 1972), 13: 1585–6; “Bio-bibliografie,” in *Kanadish-antologie*, 437; R. Korn, “An instants far zikh,” *Di goldene keyt* 91 (1976): 22–5; and *100 yor yidishe un hebraishe literatur in kanade*, 264–71.
5. M. Ravitch, *Di lider fun mayne lider*, (Montreal: Aroysgegebn fun M. Ravitch bukh komitet, 1954), 183–7.
6. See “Segal, Yakov-Yitskhak,” in *Encyclopedia Judaica* 14: 1108; and “Bio-bibliografie” in *Kanadish-antologie*, 442; and *100 yor yidishe un hebraishe literatur in kanade*, 180–4.
7. Y. Y. Segal, “Fir lider vegn mayn zun,” *Di drite sude*, 289–90. S. Levitan, trans., “A Song About My Son,” in A. Boyarsky and L. Sarna, eds., *Canadian Yiddish Writings* (Montreal: Harvest House, 1976), 104–5.
8. See “Korn, Rachel,” in *Encyclopedia Judaica* 10: 1205–6; “Bio-bibliografie,” in *Kanadish-antologie*, 437–8; “Biografies un bibliografies,” in E. Korman, *Idishe dikhterins antalogie* (Chicago: Farlag L. M. Shteyn, 1928), 352; R. Oyerbakh, “Rochl Korn (portret, varshe 1933),” *Di tsukunft* 84, no. 1 (January 1978): 20–2; and *100 yor yidishe un hebraishe literatur in kanade*, 235–9.
9. “Kh’bin durkhgeveykt mit dir,” *Bashertkeyt* (Montreal: aroysgegebn fun a komitet, 1949), 7; also “Tsu dir,” *Lider un erd* (Tel-Aviv: Farlag Hamenora, 1966), 9; also “Dir,” in E. Korman, *Idishe dikhterins antalogie* (Chicago: Farlag L. M. Shteyn, 1928), 199–200.
10. “Frimorgn in dorf,” *Heym un heymlozikeyt* (Buenos Aires: Farlage tsentral-farband fun poylishe idn in argentine, 1948), 20.
11. “Leyve,” *Heym un heymlozikeyt*, 36–8.
12. A. Tabatshnik, “Rokhl Korn, rekordirter geshprekh vegn poezie tsvishn A. Tabatshnik un Rokhl Korn,” *Zein* 12, no. 48 (February 1967): 18.
13. “Alts vos is aynzam,” *Fun yener zayt lid* (Tel-Aviv: Farlage Y. L. Peretz, 1962), 43.
14. “Mayn mamen, onshot a matseva af ir umbakanter keyver,” *Fun yener*

- zayt lid*, 11. S. Levitan, trans., "To My Mother," in *Canadian Yiddish Writings*, 93-4.
15. "Alts vos hot zikh onfartroyt mayn vort," *Di gnod fun vort* (Tel-Aviv: Farlage Hamenora, 1968), 10; also *Af der sharf fun a rege* (Tel-Aviv: Farlage Hamenora, 1968), 11; *Zein* 12, no. 48 (February 1967): 3.
 16. From "Mayn mame iz gekumen haynt tsu mir in kholem" in *Fun yener zayt lid*, 17.
 17. "Ikh veys nisht," *Fun yener zayt lid*, 44. S. Levitan, trans., "I Wonder how Much Grief," *Viewpoints* 10, no. 2 (Fall 1979): 48.
 18. "Farshem nisht mayn vort," *Fun yener zayt lid*, 23.
 19. "Fun yener zayt lid," *Fun yener zayt lid*, 9. S. Levitan, trans., "On the Other Side of the Poem," in J. R. Colombo ed., *The Poets of Canada* (Edmonton: Hurtig, 1978), 107.
 20. *Zein* 12, no. 48 (February 1967): 25.
 21. "Kh'ob haynt banakht," *Fun yener zayt lid*, 24. S. Levitan, trans., "Last Night I Felt a Poem on My Lips," in *Viewpoints* 10, no. 2 (Fall 1979): 47.
 22. "Iyev," *Fun yener zayt lid*, 67-70.
 23. For recent work by Rochl Korn, see *Di tsukunft* 83, no. 9 (September 1977): 250; *ibid.* 84, no. 2 (February 1978): 44. *Di goldene keyt* 93 (1977): 98-9; *ibid.* 95-6 (1978): 85-6. *Bay zikh*, no. 11 (April-May 1978): 48-9.
 24. "Dos alts vos iz geven amol," *Di tsukunft* 84, no. 2 (February 1978): 44. S. Levitan, trans., "All That Was True and Put Forth Leaves," in *Viewpoints* 10, no. 2 (Fall 1979): 46.

“Hyphenated Canadians: The Question of Consciousness”

Panel: Maara Haas, Myrna Kostash, George Ryga, Yar Slavutych

Maara Haas

Beginning with myself, from the premise that I was born of Ukrainian-Polish parents, this conference would have me believe that my actions, my outlook, my total behaviour must be disciplined by the genetic, historic, moral, social, religious characteristic embracing Poland and Ukraine. Only a fractured hyphenated Canadian could foster such an asinine premise. Only a Canadian could pursue this thing to the ultimate bounds of anonymity. From the moment of my birth, everything I have touched, felt, seen, experienced—consciously or subconsciously—reflects me, the singular human, the individual, mirrored in my writing. The inherent characteristics of my parents, their teachings, their traditions, will be a part of that mirrored reflection. But if I am thinking creatively that mirror will be convex.

Situation: A writer mourns the fact that he didn't speak Ukrainian well enough to communicate freely with his grandfather during the latter's lifetime. The writer also expresses a fear of death. Ukrainian hyphen Canadian, his inclination will be to write a story rabid with guilt, to punish himself for neglecting to learn his mother tongue; or sublimating as writers do creatively, he will use the language barrier as a technical device to unearth the larger universal truth. Language is not the human barrier; he's not afraid of dying. He's afraid of living; he's afraid of loving or reaching out to his grandfather or anyone else. Forget the ethnic implication.

What is desperately missing at this conference, in spite of the beautiful programming, is creativity, its realization; the fact that it is creativity that motivates the power behind the writer. I have learned everything I could ever want to know about Conrad and Klein from Dr. Kreisel, but I have learned nothing of Dr. Kreisel, the creative spirit, the spirit of and the process of ethnicity, through his own work or the work of any other writers at the conference. The twenty-minute reading assigned to writers is a fart in the wind, alienating, segregating, hyphenating; you've hyphenated the writer off the scene.

Two weeks ago, I returned from Bermuda, where I found myself teaching creative writing. While I was there I wrote a dialogue between a lizard and a tourist, in two versions, the Jamaican dialect and the Bermudian dialect. In America, in Europe, the poem would be American or European; not so in Canada, where it would have to be Jamaican-Bermudian ethnic. Some critics perceive an ethnic writer in my sometime use of idiom. But if one had suggested to John Steinbeck that the *Grapes of Wrath* is an ethnic novel because his people, the Okeeppeek people, speak in their own idiom, he would have laughed in your face.

It takes great discipline on my part not to vomit when I hear the word ethnic. My reflex action is to spit on the word that was spat on me in my formative years of the middle thirties. Dirty ethnic, rotten Slavic ethnic, ghetto freak ethnic. I was hyphenated, set apart by the English, Scottish, Irish factors outside the ghetto. Each time the word ethnic rears its hyphenated head, the odour of a clogged sewer smelling of racism poisons the air. *Evidence*: these questions and the notes from the panel discussion that read like a prelude to a pogrom. Do you feel threatened by assimilation into the dominant, anglophone culture? What role does racism play in your understanding of yourself? What do you think of people who anglicize their names, or for that matter, part their hair in the centre? As an unhyphenated Canadian writer I ask myself, and I ask you, how relevant are these questions to my story of grizzly and coyote in the land of the Shushwap Indians? How relevant are these questions to Irving Layton, whose major work is a holocaust of unrequited lust championing the all-Canadian stud?

The word ethnic pertains to the characteristics of a people or group of peoples; aesthetically, philosophically, this includes everyone or no one. Nevertheless, wishfully or wilfully, the hyphenated Canadian consciousness insists on segregation. The French will not be ethnics. Our own Indians, hyphenated natives, insist on being Indian. There are, I found out from a black African cabbie who drove me here, close to 5,000 African blacks in Edmonton. What do you know of their ethnicity? What do you know of the volatile evolution of American blacks, Leroy Jones, Larry Neil, Charlie

Parker, Malcolm X, stemming from the early twenties? The suggestion that *Roots* is some kind of phenomenon illustrates our hyphenization of people outside the sacred ethnic circle. Through our insistence to remain, and through our insistence to remain self-sustaining, we hyphenate, we negate our culture. I am very tempted to blow the lid off everything and write a paper or a study on Margaret⁸ Atwood, English-hyphenated Canadian ethnic. How would I define hyphenated Canadians, the question of consciousness? *Engine ide, kaboosa nema*. The engine of the train moves forward, but the tail end of the train is nohow a part of the creature's head, existing, thinking as an isolated being, which does not acknowledge the rest of its body.

Chairperson

Would any of the people on the panel like to respond to Maara's statement rather than make a statement of their own?

Myrna Kostash

Again an opening statement which is rather autobiographical, because through it I hope to raise what to me has been *the* question of this whole conference: what am I doing here? I'm a third-generation Canadian (the second generation born in Canada) raised as an ethnic without the Ukrainian language. How was this possible? How is ethnicity inherited without the language or the literature? I have evidence from my own life that my ethnicity was, as it had to be, transmitted through ways other than language, although the latter was by no means totally absent. It was around me all the time through the conversations of my parents, my grandparents, the people in the church, etc., and I went to *ridna shkola* rather haphazardly for a few years and learned some rudiments. I went to church, which I understood to be an exercise in ethnicity as well as some kind of spiritual testament. One went to church as a Ukrainian. There was the music and dance, of course, that is rather self-evident, and all those concerts in the proverbial church basement, which I again took to be an ethnic statement. There were the rituals around Christmas and Easter, weddings, funerals and family reunions, which took place at the drop of a hat. There was the neighbourhood where I grew up in northeast Edmonton, a working-class ethnic neighbourhood. I was called a bohunk from time to time, although it was by no means the embittering experience that it seems to have been for Maara, probably because I was protected in an upwardly mobile middle-class neighbourhood by the time I was twelve. Finally, there was my parents' community, almost entirely Ukrainian, and my very best friends from childhood have been my relatives, especially my cousins.

However, since English is my mother tongue and my second language is French (which stands to reason because of all the motivations and rewards around it) my ethnicity was contained within a much larger identity—a Canadian one or more cynically an Anglo-American one—and as I grew up my ethnic identity was even more circumscribed, becoming eventually merely an intimate sphere of experience up to and including the point where I became a writer. At this point I understood that my antecedents were in George Orwell, Norman Mailer and Joan Pidion. As a journalist, I couldn't have named a Ukrainian source for this activity if my life depended on it. My ethnicity was something over there, on the side, that I would dip into when I wanted to take a break from being a writer.

However, several years later, here I am, a member of a panel discussing ethnicity, and I think I'm here because I wrote a book about Ukrainian Canadians. If I hadn't written that book would I be here? Am I ethnic because I wrote about Ukrainians or is there something else about me in my function as a writer which is ethnic? The question for me, then, is did I write that book as an ethnic or as a journalist? Well, I think I wrote it as a journalist, but that the ethnic in me chose it and out of all the hundreds of projects that are available to the Canadian writer, I chose to write about the Ukrainians in *Two Hills*. Mind you, that's one choice and it's done, and I've now chosen something else to deal with, not related to the Ukrainians, and the whole question is going to have to come up again as to why I chose the second book. For me, the question for this whole weekend has been: does an ethnic who writes, write ethnic literature? That has not been answered, and it is a question I would like to put forward.

Yar Slavutych

As the autobiographical approach is in fashion, I too shall resort to it. I was born a Ukrainian and naturally I will die a Ukrainian. My nationality was, is and will be Ukrainian. In my lifetime I have changed my citizenship three times. I was born in 1918 as a citizen of the Ukrainian National Republic. When I was five years old, the Russian communists took over Ukraine completely, creating the artificial Soviet Union, and without my knowledge or permission, I became a Soviet citizen.

In 1949 I went to the United States. I was one of many displaced persons in the 1940s and not many countries wanted to take us. Thus five years later, I became an American citizen out of gratitude to the country that accepted me. I completed my education with a Ph.D. at the University of Pennsylvania. Afterward, I taught Ukrainian at the U.S. Army Language School.

Soon, I realized that the United States is a melting pot. I did not like that. I did not like that at all and I looked around for a means to retain my ethnic identity. While searching, I discovered the Canadian Ukraine, the Prairie provinces, where many Ukrainians live. So I moved here. Fortunately, there was a position available at the University of Alberta, where I began to teach the first accredited Ukrainian course in Alberta.

To sum up, I became an American citizen in the early fifties and changed my citizenship to Canadian because, in my opinion, Canada is the only country in the world in which I will not be assimilated into the dominant culture. By nationality, then, I am Ukrainian and by citizenship, I am Canadian. Canada is a country of many languages and cultures. As Ukrainian has been spoken here for almost a hundred years, I see it as a Canadian language.

In Canada, there are many Ukrainian organizations, church communities, clubs and many families in which Ukrainian is spoken. Newspapers, magazines and books in this language are flourishing. I live as I would in Ukraine, with the sole difference that in Soviet Ukraine there is no freedom of speech. There I could not express myself freely, whereas here I am doing exactly that. I think it would be appropriate to quote a poem I learned while visiting Japan. It was translated orally for me by a Japanese author. Later, I was able to locate the poem in a Canadian book, because I knew the author and contents. The poem is entitled "Fish":

*A long way from home
They have been brought
And yet these goldfish
Already seem to enjoy
Swimming in Canadian waters*

So I am that fish. Not a goldfish exactly, since I am greyish now, but like those lucky Japanese goldfish, I do "enjoy swimming in Canadian waters." I live here as a free man (and underline this fact), while my compatriots in Ukraine, under the oppressive Soviet regime, are deprived of freedom of speech. How many of you know that during the thirties, more than 200 Ukrainian poets, writers, literary scholars and linguists were destroyed by the Russian communists? Had I been there, I would have been sent to a concentration camp in Siberia, perhaps alongside Valentyn Moroz, who was released recently at the behest of the American government. He is now in the U.S. but Soviet persecution, that genocidal

oppression, continues. This year, in the city of Lviv, the poet and composer Volodymyr Ivasiuk was killed, and for what? For refusing to write some music to verses in Russian, praising Moscow and the Soviet government. He said to the oppressors, "I compose my songs in Ukrainian and I write my music to Ukrainian words." To reiterate, we are able to swim freely and gladly in Canadian waters, and how lucky we are!

I already noted that Ukrainian has been spoken in Canada for almost a hundred years. I maintain that it will still be spoken a hundred years hence. How should I identify myself? Well, I stated that my nationality was, is and will naturally continue to be Ukrainian. My citizenship, however, is Canadian. While editing *Kanadska Ukraina* (The Canadian Ukraine), I put a sort of credo in the upper corner of the front page: "Na chuzhyni, v nashchadkakh, bez kintsia plekaty neznyshchennu Ukrainu!" (Far away from the country of our birth, we are here to retain and develop Ukrainian culture and to pass it down from generation to generation). That creed is my creed and I am sure it is the creed of many Canadian Ukrainians.

In the matter of self-identification, I wish to underline that I cannot cut off my roots. Like the Jews, Ukrainians now live in all parts of the world; in Australia, South and North America, even in Thailand. To maintain Ukrainian as a Canadian language, a language of the country in which Ukrainians live, we must use it and thereby retain the essence, the substance of what we are. As an author of Ukrainian literature, I try to represent it. I try to express myself, and if future Ukrainian authors in Canada continue to do the same, it will help Ukraine greatly. Should Ukraine regain its freedom some of us would probably return; others would undoubtedly stay here and enrich this country with our creative literature and culture. A true poet can only express himself fully in his native language, in his mother tongue. I tried to write in English, that is, I translated poetry from Ukrainian into English. Though it has been reviewed favourably, I do not regard it as meritorious. Although I speak several languages and have a high regard for literature written in other languages, for me, Ukrainian is the only truly creative medium.

George Ryga

Much of what I have to say, I think Maara Haas covered quite eloquently at the beginning. As for the previous speaker, I would like to congratulate him on being a goldfish in a bowl, but there are many of us who tend and clean up after the goldfish, and as one such person I would like to disassociate myself from some of the sentiments that were expressed.

We're discussing Canadian literature in a Canadian context and everything that implies. As a contributor to that literature, I find it

difficult to see myself as a so-called hyphenated Canadian. In fact, in the past three days I have heard that term more than in the last forty-seven years of my life. To me, the hyphenation stems from the multicultural policies established by the hierarchy of the Liberal Party of Canada as part of their continental resources policy. They are designed to fragment the attention and preoccupation of this country so that its sell-out to the Americans can continue without resistance. Lately, Liberal strategy has been complicated by another factor—the right of our brothers and sisters in the province of Quebec to self-determination. In other words, if we can flatten the area and throw the question out across the country, it will somehow nullify the legitimate interests of a culture which has been intact since the discovery of Canada. To the extent that this conference has similar interests, I strongly disapprove of it.

The hyphenated Canadian began at an early age, because as Jars (Balan) pointed out in his paper this morning, “There are scars that shape me as an artist.” One such scar was inflicted before the nicety of hyphenation appeared, namely, the appellation Jewish Canadian or Ukrainian Canadian, etc. As a youngster, I heard words like kraut, bohunk, wop; they were not pleasant. They were equivalent to son-of-a-bitch, that is, the most extreme labels that could be thrown in your direction. You had to live with them because you were conscious of being a member of a minority; a member of a peasant class which had no access to information, no sense of the country’s judicial values, subjected to some of the crudest punishments that a colonial system could impose upon its smaller minorities.

I am beginning to wonder, though, if we are not asking for and wanting to settle for something slightly nicer but equally harmful; a translation of bohunk into Ukrainian Canadian, wop into Italian Canadian, etc. Let us remember this, you [referring to Professor Slavutych] are an exception. Those of us who are second-third-generation Canadians know that our parents and forebears were not brought to this country for their intellectual contributions, to wake up the universities. They were brought to build the railways and mines, right? That is an obligation that we cannot overlook under any circumstances. We owe it to our ancestors to record their history as accurately as possible and with a respect for what is implied.

Yesterday, in response to David Arnason’s excellent article on the Icelandic contribution to this country, I suggested that the organizing committee or whoever is responsible for this conference make an attempt to give recognition to Stephansson, a man who came out of this province and made a contribution to world literature. How many among you are conscious of the fact that the man was a Marxist and how many refuse to support the suggestion for that reason? We cannot take those kinds of risks; we cannot disconnect ourselves from the reality of who we are or how we

came to hold conferences in these kinds of buildings. All this was built on social values. People actually bled and died for it, and my writing is committed to their memory.

While living in Mexico, I had to learn Spanish in order to examine and write on themes which affected me as a humanist. I did not do this with a conscious ethnic purpose. I was concerned with the broader issue of human suffering, which was created and maintained through motives of profit. I have maintained excellent relations with Soviet writers; I have maintained excellent relations also with Mikis Theodorakis in Athens. I maintain relationships with people all over the world, without any conception that I do so from the standpoint of an ethnic minority in Canada. I do so as a Canadian who understands that the welfare of others is somehow going to reflect my welfare and the welfare of my children. That is my credo and I regard discussion of some of the questions raised at this conference as a useless exercise. It is meaningless. I choose to learn the languages which I need in order to function as a writer. That does not mean that I would tear off my roots and denounce my native language and my heritage; that is the foundation stone on which everything else is built. But it only represents three or four or five per cent of my existence.

When I wake up in the morning, I check myself out to see if I am still a man. Having determined that I am, I then face the world on its merits, based on what is happening in the newspapers that day, what is happening on television, what is happening to the seasons of the year, and I function that way. People can, of course, write papers on various topics. Take for example Jars Balan's paper; I congratulate him on a fine effort, but I could not identify with it. I listened to it as an outsider. I do not live in the past. I do not live in my father's frame of reference, in terms of why he came to Canada. He came and he lived and I'm concerned with what happened to him when he arrived.

Similarly, I am concerned about Soviet dissidents not because they are Ukrainians, but because their society denies them their constitutional right to freedom of expression. I have asked for judicial procedures to be implemented to help them, but not specifically because they are Ukrainians. There is a voluminous file in the Soviet Embassy on behalf of Solzhenitsyn, as there is on Moroz. So let's be careful not to accommodate the rising middle class. Somehow, all of a sudden, to be of the Canadian middle class means that you have to categorize yourself; the Jewish people say "I'm Jewish" and everyone is attaching labels to themselves.

Eventually we are going to short change ourselves, for example, when we fail to understand the implications of Quebec's right to self-determination because, preoccupied with relatively unimportant matters, we have overlooked that question. The British are a minority in English Canada.

What we are discussing is colonialism, if you like, of an economic nature. If we adopt the English language, then let's work within it, as the Americans did, and everything else will spring from that.

Chairperson

Would any of the other panelists like to respond to what has been said?

Myrna Kostash

Yes, I would like to say a couple of things right off the top of my head, before I forget them. I find myself in a curious kind of syllogism, if that is the right word. That is, if I agree with George and George agrees with Maara, does that mean I agree with Maara? No. In reference to what George and Maara have said about labels and specifically hyphenation and ethnicity, I think I'm the only one who is not bothered by that. In fact, I gratefully take on that appellation, and would like to make an analogy between that process and one which occurred to me earlier in the women's movement. I learned a valuable lesson, namely, that you reappropriate the language that the oppressor has used to put you down. In other words, there was a complete vocabulary used to debase women. In fact, the word "woman" was something that we shied away from. No, we were not women, we were human beings; we didn't come out of women, we came out of humanity. There was no such thing as the oppression of women; there was simply a concern about human liberation and so on. Well, I think that has been exposed by some feminists for the liberal fantasy it is, and as an ethnic, I feel much the same. I'm not "just" a Canadian; I think there is an obligation among the oppressed minorities and oppressed groups in this country to redefine themselves from their own experience, with their own purpose in mind and not be misled by the liberal fantasies of the dominant culture.

Second, George's statement about his being able to make contact with people like Theodorakis or the dissidents in the Soviet Union only through human generalities reminds me that it was only after I accepted my ethnicity in Canada that I was able to make the same link. It may be that there is a generational difference between us. I grew up in a rather more privileged set of circumstances. But it was, as I say, when I finally let go of the misconception that one was really just part of a generalized crowd in this country, when I accepted that there are ways in which I am particular, that I was finally able to accept the fact that I had to struggle. Once I got that far, I then looked around and discovered that other people were part of the same struggle, as in Quebec; and it was through my ethnicity that I was able to find common cause with Quebec. If I had

believed that I was just a Canadian, I think I would be like all those other Toronto middle-class people who are very frightened of what's going on right now in Quebec. As a Ukrainian Canadian, as a woman and as someone in the West who is not the least bit scared, I'm quite excited by it.

George Ryga

And so, let me understand, your reidentification with that part of yourself sharpened your perception?

Myrna Kostash

Yes, accepting one's uniqueness.

Participant

Is that perhaps a generational thing, then, or is it because you're, as you say, third generation?

Myrna Kostash

No, not in that sense of generation but in the sense of my growing up intellectually and politically in the sixties, when it was impossible to avoid these kinds of identifications. It might have been a lonelier struggle for Maara and George.

Participant

It is very disturbing to hear it said that the people in Toronto are scared. What are they scared of?

Myrna Kostash

The loss of privilege.

Participant

What kind of privilege? Your language is very different from the language that I have lived with for years. Take Maara's definition of ethnic. She says that every single person in the world is an ethnic, whether he be Scottish, English, Trinidadian or what have you. Is ethnic wrongly defined, or is it simply that people don't understand language?

Maara Haas

People choose to understand neither language nor one another. Ethnicity is a term universally applicable to a group of people called humanity, my lizard in Bermuda not excluded.

Participant

And everybody has it?

Maara Haas

Certainly.

Myrna Kostash

But the word "woman" in the dictionary has a sense which has nothing to do with the way the women's movement is going.

Participant

I am really annoyed to hear ethnicity propagated like religion. Do you know what will be the logical outcome of this so-called multiculturalism (which people don't seem to understand)—balkanization. We will have thirty-eight little countries with barriers around them.

George Ryga

I'd like to say something about the multicultural policy because I think there is a real fondness for that animal. A number of years ago there was a choral-symphonic group in Toronto called the Shevchenko Ensemble, who felt trapped. On the one hand, they were using traditional materials and getting new arrangements from Kiev. On the other, the ages of both the orchestra and chorus and their audiences were getting higher and higher and the young people were losing interest.

One day, Eugene Dolny phoned me and asked whether I would accept a commission with Maurice Sergin to compose a choral symphony based on a Canadian experience. There was no compulsion to do anything too exciting. I called Maurice, who agreed and suggested that we approach the multicultural agency in Ottawa. The proposal was duly accepted but, although both of us are native artists who have made contributions to this country for many years, we soon discovered that within the multicultural policy there was no provision for moving forward. The money for the commission had to be raised by public subscription and the sale of tickets. When the performance premiered in Massey Hall, 1,000 people were turned away at the door.

What had happened was that my libretto had reduced the question not to one of ethnicity but to regionalism. There are five regions in Canada that are as distinct as the countries of Europe. The character I created travelled through these regions, suffered mixed fortunes and eventually became very old and died in an indistinguishable part. It did fire the popular imagination and excited the orchestra, but that is immaterial. My

point is that although I sympathize with Myrna's point of view and understand that people have to make some commitment, whether religious, sociological, political or ethnic, it does not really matter as long as it doesn't become paramount, as long as we live within our time and within our region. This province is very different from British Columbia or Manitoba or the Maritimes. If we must attach labels, then let's do it as westcoasters, plainspeople, maritimers, quebecois. This is legitimate because it is based on the dynamics of a nation that is going forward instinctively with these definitions; they are already familiar to the people.

Participant

Getting recognition for the writer Stephansson is essentially a political question. How should we proceed?

George Ryga

Well, I think the university and all participants in these sessions should petition the government or whatever agency is responsible for such matters. This is not my province, but there must be a government agency that would receive and heed a recommendation supported by 300 or 400 signatures. This is essential because (a) the man is universal and (b) in the past year alone, 2,500 tourists came to see his grave. The physical upkeep of the grave site is important, yet as far as I know it's not being looked after. That's the dead man; for the living man, we should commission some good translations of his works. One does not have to translate a whole body of work, but those studying Canadian literature at university (of whom my son is one) should be introduced to Stephansson in translation.

Yar Slavutych

I would like to make a comment concerning George Ryga's remarks. In speaking about Canada, I used the metaphor "Canadian waters." Of course, this country has many human lakes. In some lakes there is blue water; in others the water is polluted. This is perhaps a good forum to talk about cleaning the dirty water, eliminating injustice. Unfortunately, in countries like the Soviet Union it cannot be done. Yet when we in Canada speak of identity or of writing for art's sake or some other purpose, there may be missionaries or other apostles among us prepared to clear such waters as are still polluted.

Participant

Polluted with what?

Yar Slavutych

I am speaking metaphorically. I mean cases of injustice, discrimination, bias toward members of ethnic groups. Discrimination has abated to some extent, but from time to time it reappears and we have to fight it. If there are injustices—what I call pollution—then we have to eliminate them by cleaning the waters. As writers, we have to contribute so that “Canadian waters” will be bluer and enable all to swim even better.

Participant

Being somewhat older than most here, I wish to point out that the word “ethnic” was not heard of until after the Second World War. Earlier we were always called simply Ukrainian Canadians, German Canadians, etc. When I first went to school I was called bohunk and I protested very strongly. I preferred Ukrainian Canadian because my father and mother were Ukrainian, my culture was Ukrainian. But I was born in Gimli, Manitoba, which is in Canada. I still don’t like the term “ethnic,” even when it is applied to all the people who have come to Canada. I’m Canadian-born and am therefore a Canadian—a Canadian of Ukrainian descent. My heart and soul remain Ukrainian, but I’m Canadian.

Chairperson

I think it needs to be recognized that we are all either immigrants or descended from people who were once immigrants, even the English.

Maara Haas

May I make a comment on immigrants? Every time I go to a new city, a new building, I’m an immigrant, because I don’t know the ways of that city or place. I don’t know the tunnels, the universities, the inhabitants, (their cultural and social attitudes). I’m very careful to observe differences—places, people, words. I honour the explicitness of words. So why is it immigrant literature, why not early literature of Canada? Again, I ask, why the obsession with hyphenating, chopping, alienating, dissecting people/words from one another?

George Ryga

The point I’d like to make is one that disturbs me greatly. Those of you who have been admitted to a hospital under duress—in other words you didn’t simply walk in, you were taken there by an ambulance—may remember the form you have to fill out. One of the questions that has always irritated me is “what religion are you?” I have always considered religion to be a very personal thing, not to be publicly declared. Otherwise,

you might be required to declare your religion, your political association, your race and your ethnic background. I feel that my civil liberties are tampered with when questions are asked about my political or religious persuasions.

Maara Haas

Is your gall bladder Baptist?

George Ryga

Right, and in the same sense I don't think the question of my origins concerns anyone but myself. It's a very personal thing. As Jars [Balan] has pointed out, it's associated with things that are very deep inside you. In the agony of creative work and writing, you draw on that resource, but it's not a pudding for political consumption. It's just my own thing.

Myrna Kostash

It may be true that in some kind of psycho-social-mythological way we are all immigrants. To me, however, that is really unhistorical. The British immigrant of the eighteenth or nineteenth century came to a colony of the mother country, and although he or she was in exile from the mother culture, the ties remained unbroken. All subsequent immigrants were cut off from their mother culture and interjected into a culture which was recognized *de facto* as that of the ruling class. I think that politically and historically it is a very different situation, and that ethnicity should be seen as a political category.

Yar Slavutych

Just one comment in connection with that. The only native Canadians are the Indians. They are the original Canadians. All the others, whether they arrived 300 or ten years ago, are immigrants in terms of generations. We become Canadians of different cultures, of course. Canada is a country of many languages and cultures and the official policy of multiculturalism encourages members of groups to retain and develop their cultures. That can only contribute to the cultural development of Canada. These are rich resources brought here either by our parents or ourselves.

Maara Haas

It's the whole concept of multiculturalism that bothers me. Each time I go to a multicultural conference, I meet someone who seems very excited about the idea that a Ukrainian or a Greek is going to be the first man on the multicultural moon. I have to remind him that from the time when the

first fur traders and the first explorers landed on the shores of Canada and integrated with the Indians, we became multiculturalists. So I cannot see why we even use the word. We are, we exist, can't we accept that? We are becoming fuddled and thus we are avoiding all the main issues, the issues that need attention and that (not metaphorically) is the pollution of our waters.

Participant

When we talk about these things we tend to get heated and I think it is important to try to find conditions that apply to everyone on a very personal issue. The problem with Canadians, hyphenated or otherwise, is that they have never had to make up their minds about who they are. I know who I am, I'm a Ukrainian. I have lived in the United States and Germany and when asked about my identity have always said I'm Ukrainian. However, if a Ukrainian had to leave Canada permanently to take up residence, for example, in the United States, he would be considered a Canadian émigré. So one has to make up one's own mind. Moreover, I don't think that this issue can be resolved at a conference.

Another participant

The world is going to be in a hell of a mess unless we start thinking of ourselves as human beings, including our silent Metis and Indians, who have suffered a psychological beating through the condescending attitude of the white rulers.

Yar Slavutych

That was pollution.

Chairperson

Could we please focus on the main discussion? I feel that at times we become a bit too irrelevant. Also, some people haven't had a chance to speak whereas others have perhaps spoken too much. Let's keep the discussion moving in a positive direction. I see Maria Campbell and Pier Giorgio di Cicco, two of the writers at this conference, wanting to speak. In that order, please.

Maria Campbell

I would just like to make a comment on what has been said. I'm afraid that people like Dr. Slavutych will continue to get very romantic about all the freedoms in Canada, perhaps because this country accepted him and treated him well in terms of education. But for the native people, this was

not the case. When you [referring to Dr. Slavutych] were allowed to speak your language a hundred years ago, our language was being taken away from us. When our people fought to retain their language and to practice their religion, they were imprisoned and some were hanged. There were mass graves of them, but no one knows where they are because the RCMP moved them. Until about fifteen years ago we were not allowed to practice our religion. A ninety-two-year-old woman found practising it received a ten-year prison sentence. Until eight years ago, when Trudeau decided that he would make his contribution to us by saying that the half-breed people are a racial group, my people were not recognized as such a group in Canada.

So, I really identify with what Myrna is saying. Sometimes you have to touch your roots to find out where you are going. The kinds of things that Myrna and I are able to do are a result of our being able to look at each other's cultures, to appreciate them and know that we may develop them. Perhaps we can even make changes that ensure that our children don't have to suffer the same experiences as their grandfathers and the things I went through as a child.

I can identify also with what [George] Ryga is saying when he writes about all the different people. Those people are real to me; they are not ethnic Ukrainians or Mexicans, they're people with the same inner feelings as myself. They are people who cry, who are lonely, who are hurt, who have to fight constantly. And it's important for us to know that it doesn't matter what colour we are or where we come from. We have one enemy. We can't do anything if we are standing around saying okay I'm really special, I'm going to make it special for the Metis in Canada. By doing this, we merely impress each other.

Yar Slavutych

I quite agree with you. You have described a sort of social pollution which occurred years ago. Fortunately, many human lakes have been cleared and the Trudeau government contributed to that, but there are numerous human lakes that are still polluted, so let's clean them! We will then be in full agreement.

Chairperson

I think that's a very difficult thing. Pier, did you want to say something?

Pier Giorgio di Cicco

Yes. I am a little appalled at the emotional backlash which seems to have pervaded Dr. Slavutych's comments for one reason or another. The matter

of hyphenation is either a useful convenience or a limitation, depending on the degree of intelligence, discretion and personal experience that one brings to bear. How far one should go in being a hyphenated Canadian or in anything in character, personality, temperament is an individual matter and one that could not be agreed on by everyone in this room. But I'd like to ask Myrna if she could say something about the formalists she mentioned yesterday and today. I mentioned technical writing and technique, but I never discussed formalism in ethnic writing as such.

Myrna Kostash

I guess I'm putting the question most directly to myself, because as I have indicated, I'm not sure I'd be here at all if I hadn't written a book about Ukrainians. If you take away the subject matter from the literature, I'm not sure whether it is still ethnic literature. For instance, when the book came out, one or two reviewers touched on the literary rather than the strictly sociological or historical values of the book. Adele Wiseman wrote in a review that I write with ethnic passion, Slavic passion, something like that. That struck me very much because I thought, well, there is something within the language or structure of this book, irrespective of the fact that it is about Two Hills, that provides a clue to the fact that I am of Slavic origin. In other words, I didn't necessarily need to have the language in my head to get that identity across.

A negative feature of my book that some people picked up was the defensiveness of tone and a tendency to overstate my case. I can see how that could be interpreted as an ethnic characteristic, a sort of ghetto reaction, but it could also just as easily apply to the fact that I'm a Canadian vis à vis the American empire. Is that, then, a Canadian characteristic or is it, in fact, a western characteristic vis à vis Toronto? Similarly, is the defensiveness I show in writing about Two Hills a female characteristic, where, for example, I have to address myself to the Toronto émigré community? I am a female voice in a wilderness of masculine supremacy, so in the end, I don't know. But this generalized condition of somehow being an outsider, of being a down and outer, does come through.

Pier Giorgio di Cicco

I think that the main omission in these conferences, especially one that entitles itself "Ethnicity and the Canadian Writer," is the disregard for what it is about the writer's language and art that is ethnic. This has to be a matter of some critical scrutiny. It's all fine and reassuring and cathartic to discuss theoretically what it is to feel something, to be someone of a particular background or direction, but it isn't really addressing itself to

the point that will be of real significance in Canadian literature in the years to come. What is the contribution, in terms of language, of writers from non-Anglo-Saxon backgrounds writing now in English?

George Ryga

That's an interesting question and one that could take the rest of the afternoon to answer. In fact, I think it is the critical question of just about every discussion we've had here. To be a writer in Canada, from whatever background, is to be regionalized. Myrna is very conscious of the fact that she is Albertan; it's the size of the coat she wears. It doesn't have to be fitted or adjusted, it's simply there.

However, in the regions there is an additional obligation that you do not have within older cultures, namely, that you have to keep your ear very close to the living speech, the rhythms, the spatial values of the landscape, because this is where the newness of everything comes out first. A conversation, for example, conducted by two people walking in several feet of snow across a parking lot will be essentially different from one between the same people walking along a paved road on a sunny day, because the spatial values have changed.

The changed stresses require physical adjustment to a new rhythm. The use of English by native peoples or new immigrants who have the echoes of other speech patterns is different in its music and rhythmic patterns and I think that the serious writer today has constantly to reconfirm that. You cannot be an ivory tower writer. Last night, when David Arnason and I went for a walk, we were both doing the same thing. Although we had never discussed it at the time, we were both listening to people talking in doorways and shouting out of cars. It was a most exhilarating hour because we made adjustments in our ability to hear.

Pier Giorgio di Cicco

What exactly does a Ukrainian Canadian or Italian Canadian bring to the rhythm when he is practising English?

George Ryga

I think you bring a mystical framework in which you function. That's all you do. You don't bring the language; you don't bring anything. It doesn't work. You can't reinterpret a conversation between two native men on the street through the language. This applies to whatever your mother tongue may be. I didn't speak English until I was seven years of age. That's the first time I heard English. I have a good memory for dialect. I have a good memory for patterns, cadences and that kind of thing. Yet I do not refer to

any filtering process in that context. My Ukrainian entity is merely the mood or the coloration through which I will view things. It is certainly not linguistic.

Pier Giorgio di Cicco

Do you yourself speak Ukrainian?

George Ryga

Yes, but I grew up with the Hutsul dialect, which is very different from the language of Ternopil or Kiev.

Yar Slavutych

I like your writings, George, and I read them again and again. As far as vocabulary is concerned, it seems to me that in your prose fiction you are rather inclined to linear language or the colloquial medium. In your poetry, you try to be more selective. Are you doing that on purpose or is it just by chance that there are fewer colloquialisms in your poetry than in your prose?

George Ryga

Yes, this is true. I probably function with 600 words in my writing. In poetry, I am more selective because the discipline of the art form is different. You work for sound values and so the selections rest on direct imagery.

Jars Balan

The writers at this conference have illustrated just how complex the issue of ethnicity really is and how it affects everyone in such an individual way. It is very difficult to make generalizations about it. I don't know if you realize it but this is the first time that a conference has been held to examine the ethnic dimension and the contribution of Canada's ethnic groups to Canadian literature. I think that's significant, though it's only a start. There are a lot of people that we should have had here, for example a speaker on Celtic culture in Canada and another on the situation in Quebec. The latter could be a conference in itself and would probably pose more problems than it would solve.

As for this thing called multiculturalism, I for one feel that although the Liberal government has managed to direct a lot of ideas and needs into nice safe channels like dance groups, it is important to acknowledge the fact that people were demanding that their contribution to Canada be recognized in the same way that in the sixties the Quebecois demanded the

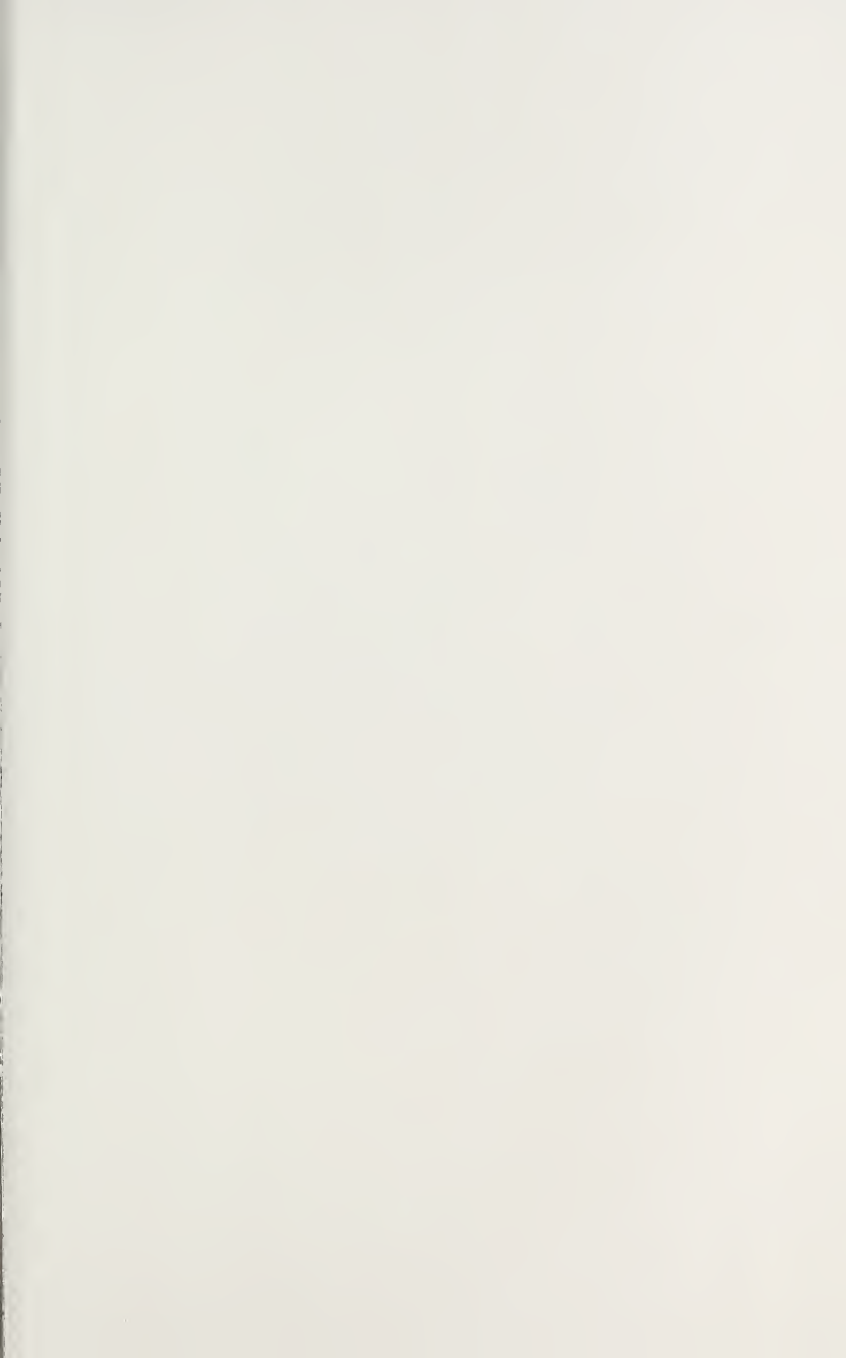
restoration of their identity. The black Americans in the United States went through the same process, declaring that they wanted to see their contribution to the country depicted in history books.

As a student of Canadian literature at the university, I felt that the courses were limited to Anglo-Canadian and a few French Canadian writers. I knew that there were Ukrainian writers, for example, who wrote in Ukrainian or English on Canadian themes and who would be of interest and should have had a place in such a course. Stephansson is another example. We won't know how many others are out there until we start having conferences like this one and such questions can be raised. This is one of the main reasons why a conference of this kind is very important.

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Presents selected papers from a conference held in Edmonton in 1979, which examined the relationship between ethnicity and the literature of selected writers in Canada. Includes the following essays: "The 'Ethnic' Writer in Canada" (H. Kreisel); "Expectations and Reality in Early Ukrainian Literature in Canada" (Y. Slavutych); "Canadian Hungarian Literature" (G. Bisztray); "Ukrainian Influences in George Ryga's Work" (J. Balan); "Icelandic Canadian Literature" (D. Arnason); "Ukrainian Emigré Literature in Canada" (D. Struk); "The Unheard Voices: Ideological or Literary Identification of Canada's Ethnic Writers" (J. Young); and "An Introduction to Canadian Yiddish Writers" (S. Levitan). The volume also contains two panel discussions on "Ethnicity and Identity—the Question of One's Literary Passport" (P. G. di Cicco, M. Campbell, A. Suknaski, R. Wiebe) and "Hyphenated Canadians—the Question of Consciousness" (M. Haas, M. Kostash, G. Ryga, Y. Slavutych).